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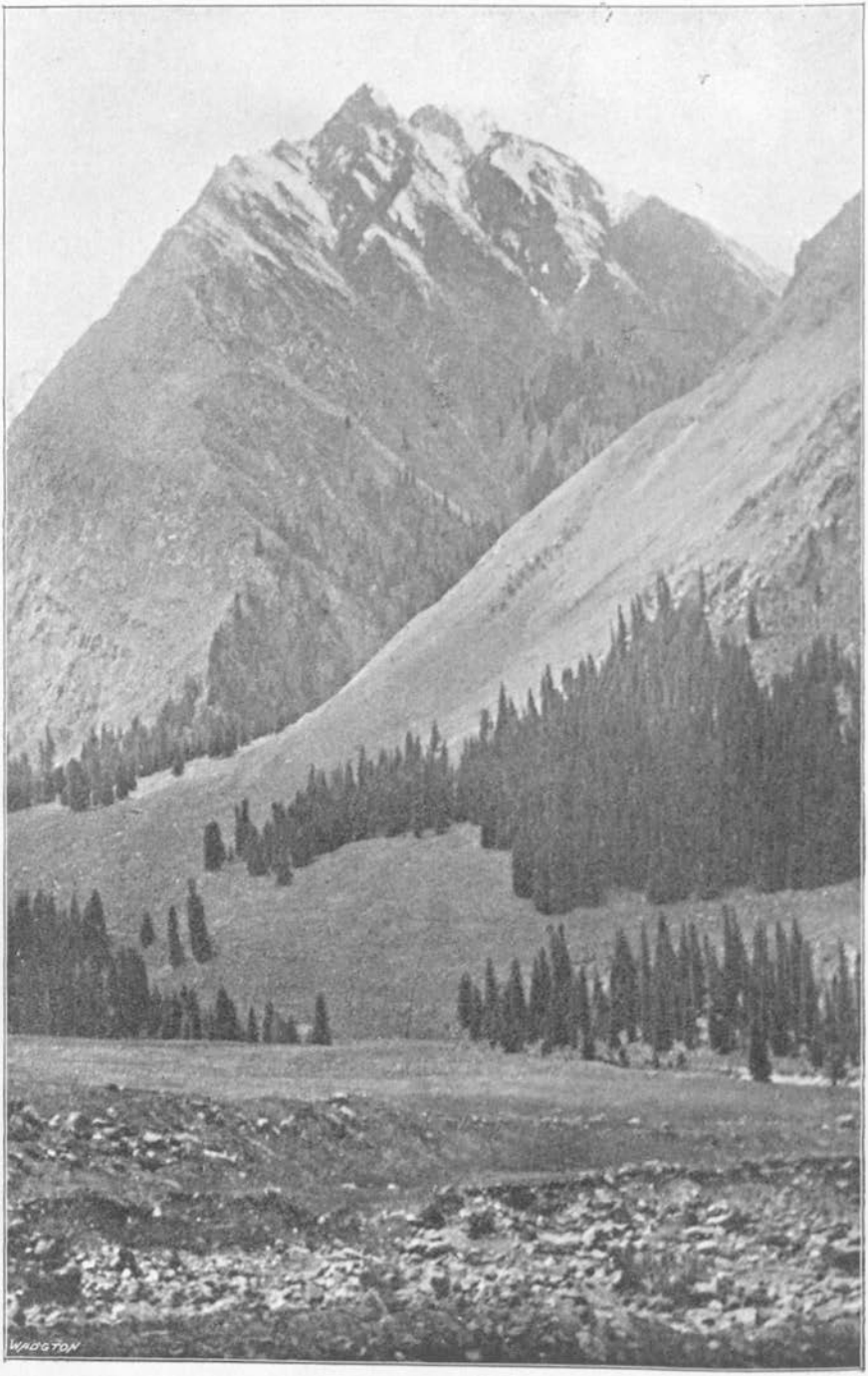

VIEW IN THE THIAN SHAN.

ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF EMPIRE IN 'ASIA

85198

BY

THE EARL OF RONALDSHAY

F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF 'SPORT AND POLITICS UNDER AN EASTERN SKY'

"It is in Asia once again that will be decided the destinies of the world. In Asia will be founded and will increase great empires, and whoever succeeds in making his voice heeded in the Far East will be able also to speak in dominating accents to Europe."—PRINCE HENRI D'ORLEANS: *Around Tonkin.*

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PREFACE.

THE object and scope of the present volume are set forth at sufficient length in the opening chapter, and no further explanation on this score is required from me here. With regard to arrangement, it has been my endeavour to place before the public an account of some of the less accessible countries of Asia and of the problems to which their existence and present position give rise, which may appeal equally to the general reader and to the student of Eastern questions. With this object in view I have caused to be inserted a number of illustrations, reproductions in every case of photographs taken by myself, in the hope that they may prove of assistance to the reader in forming a mental picture of the countries and peoples that I describe. The countries through which I passed being many and various, I have divided the volume into sections, each one of which may be read without reference to the others. In Section I. will be found a synopsis of the chapters that follow; in Sections II.-VI. a description of a journey the length of an ancient continent; and in

the concluding section some account of the political situation in the East with which this country is confronted at the present time. Sections II.-VI. may be said to consist in the main of a narrative of travel, and, since my wanderings led me at one time through an unrivalled sporting country, I have not hesitated to include among them a section upon sport; but though devoted largely to a description of travel, some political questions—the Baghdad railway problem to wit—are discussed in them, something of history is recalled, and such information as my inquiries in various directions elicited is adduced for the benefit of all who take a close interest in the peoples and politics of Asia. It has been said of travellers—not altogether without reason perhaps—that they forget much that they have seen, and remember much that they have not! If I plead guilty to the former charge, I may, I hope, in my own case conscientiously take exception to the latter, since it has been my practice, whenever seeing anything of interest or learning anything of importance from reliable sources, to take instant note of it upon the spot.

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary for me to add that I am indebted to many for much willing help and sympathetic interest shown to me by my own countrymen and by foreigners alike, whether official or otherwise, whenever my wanderings have brought me in contact with them in the remote corners of the East. In this connection it is also my pleasant duty to acknowledge my indebtedness to the proprietors of 'The Times' for the ready assent which they gave

to my request to be permitted to make use in the present volume of articles from my pen which have already appeared in their columns.

In conclusion, may I express the hope that there may be found in the following pages sufficient of interest to evoke from the reading public the same indulgent reception for this, my second and more ambitious volume, that they so readily accorded to my first.

RONALDSHAY.

August 1904.

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MAP TO ILLUSTRATE AUTHOR'S ROUTE

ACROSS A CONTINENT

"Let us (since life can little more supply
Than just to look about us, and to die)
Expatiate free o'er all this scene of man;
A mighty maze! but not without a plan."

—ALEXANDER POPE, *Essay on Man.*

CHAPTER I.

ACROSS A CONTINENT.

Object of the book—Length of journey and method of travel—The desert—A site of ancient monarchies—Discomfort of travel—The spell of the East—To the heart of Asia by rail—Performance at a mosque—Monuments of the past—Central Asian post-roads—Beyond the bounds of Russia—A great trans-continental railway—The political aspect—The return of the West to the East—The remnants of Portuguese supremacy—The awakening of Russia—The Powers in Asia—The objects of Great Britain and of Russia—The policy of Tsar Nicholas I.—Failure of the same—Ineptitude of British policy in the past—Importance of British interests in the East—Lord Curzon's views—The necessity of looking Asiatic problems in the face.

Look how wide also the East is from the West! The feverish throbbing centres of the West take small stock of those things which lie not to their hand: the call of the East comes for the most part unheeded across the waste. Yet to those who listen is borne that hum which tells of mighty workings.

The East, indeed,—the real East, that is, and by the real East I mean more especially those kingdoms of Asia which can still lay claim, theoretically at any rate, to political independence of the West,—is known by personal experience to comparatively speaking so small a portion of the English public that I make no apology, however humble be my credentials, for trying to arouse an increased interest therein, or for taking up my pen once again in an endeavour to lay

before the public mind some idea of those countries of which I speak, and to call attention to some of those problems to which their existence has given rise. And I do so with all the more willingness because of my firm belief in the truth of those lines which I have caused to be inscribed on the title-page of this book, that it is in Asia once again that will be decided the destinies of the world; that that nation which succeeds in making its voice heeded in the East will be able also to speak in dominating accents to Europe. If a further excuse for these pages is demanded, it may be found in the fact that it is comparatively few to whom is given either the time or the opportunity, or perhaps even the inclination, to put away for a prolonged period the ties which bind them to their own country and, leaving the highroad of convention, to strike deep along the devious pathways of alien and not always hospitable lands.

I have never attempted to deny that the countries of Asia have for me an extreme fascination, but at the same time it would be absurd to suggest that a journey such as that which forms the thread upon which the following chapters are strung—a journey, that is, of upwards of 10,000 miles by railway, steamboat, raft, wheeled conveyance of many kinds, and pack-pony, through such countries as Asiatic Turkey, Persia, Transcaspia, Turkestan, Siberia, and Manchuria —is by any means one which is productive of unalloyed pleasure and amusement. There is nothing even remotely amusing in long hours in the saddle at caravan pace across the desert steppe of Mesopotamia. On the contrary, there is a grim reality about the limitless and forbidding expanse of an Asian desert which inspires feelings of anything but merriment.

THE RUINS OF ANCIENT BABYLON.

The vastness of it fills you with awe, the silence and absence of life weigh heavily upon you, the hovering vulture and the staring white skeleton of pony or camel speak only of death. Everything is so real and so stern, you feel that to smile or to laugh would be impossible in these surroundings; the inexorable reality of life and death is on all sides forced upon you. These are the lands where you

> "Fold your tents like the Arabs,
> And as silently steal away."

But even the desert has an end, and haltingly at first and then with more confidence signs of humanity reappear. The waters of a great river roll placidly by, the most priceless blessing in a thirsty and dry land. The bleak steppe-land is behind, and before you rise the remnants of mighty nations. The glory and magnificence, it is true, are of the past; the present is squalid in comparison with what was. But the mounds beneath which lie buried all that remains of a remote antiquity stand imperishable witnesses of the splendour of a bygone age. Two thousand five hundred years ago Nineveh, the gorgeous capital of the Assyrian empire, fell never to rise again; but the vast mass of *débris* which is to be seen on the left bank of the Tigris to-day is an object far more imposing than the collection of high-walled houses and narrow tortuous alleys, which make Mossul on the right bank a city of the unregenerate East. To the south the ruins of ancient Babylon tell of an age so remote as to bewilder the brain as it tries to gaze down the dim vistas of time at the achievements of a highly civilised race six thousand years ago, or peers uncertainly into that earlier period which hovers darkly through a legendary haze, when

Oannes, the fish god, came up from the sea to teach wisdom to the children of men. Baghdad remains now as the counterpart of the old capitals of Shumir and Accad, but modern Baghdad is not the Baghdad of the 'Arabian Nights' or of the golden days of the Kalifate. It is, in fact, hopelessly commonplace, and is of chief interest to the traveller as affording him an excuse for a rest and the congenial society of his fellow-countrymen. The halo of romance over the Baghdad of our imagination has been dimmed by the exigencies of modern trade and commerce.

As you journey eastward into Persia along the old highway from Media to Babylonia, you rise at one bound from the level plains of Assyria and Chaldæa to the elevated tableland of the Iranian plateau, ascending the rock walls of the historic "Zagros Gates." Here, on the western extremity of the Persian highlands, a series of gorges, mountain-ranges, and elevated plateaux confront you, forming a barrier as it were between the level stretches of Mesopotamia on the one side and the vast inhospitable reaches of Central Persia on the other. No difference will be found by the traveller in his mode of procedure, and as you ride slowly along on your daily march you agree with the sapient remark of the seventeenth-century traveller, Tavernier, that "the best inns are the tents which you carry along with you, and your hosts are your servants that get ready those victuals which you have bought in good towns." There is, however, one great drawback to a tent, — you cannot always use it. You cannot pitch your tent in two feet of snow, and even hoisting it in six inches of mud is a doubtful experiment; and then you must seek what accommodation is to be had in the *serai*, if there is one,

or the shelter of some village hut if there is not, where you will probably have to put up with the supreme discomfort of having nothing but "the undivided twentieth of a shed to sleep under"!

One of the chief causes wherein lies the extraordinary fascination of the Near East is perhaps its associations with the peoples and the deeds so familiar to us from our earliest days, and the changelessness of the East which enables one to realise so forcibly the conditions of life as depicted in the graphic pages of the Old Testament. As you journey across the country in the region of the two great rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, whole chapters of Genesis assume a new meaning for you, and you realise how it was that "as they journeyed in the East they came to a plain in the land of Shinar, and dwelt there."[1] You too have journeyed in the East and found a plain—the same plain—in the land of Shinar, for the land of Shinar is the Shumir of the inscriptions and the Chaldæa of to-day.

As you journey over this plain you see spread out on every side the great stage on which was enacted the story told in the historical books of the Bible. Whether you pass by the river of Gozan, where Israel remained in captivity, or walk in the city of Sennacherib, or stand among the ruined halls and temples of Nebuchadnezzar, or sit by the waters of Babylon, some portion of the great story is brought vividly before your eyes. You recognise, too, the local colouring which so sympathetically tinges the language of the Old Testament writers. It is only after you have toiled from dawn to sunset over the sand-strewn waste of an eastern desert that you appreciate the poetic beauty of such verses as "rivers of water in a dry place, the shadow of a great

[1] Gen. xi. 2.

rock in a weary land,"[1] or that the vivid reality of that description which tells of "a land of deserts and of pits, a land of droughts and of the shadow of death, a land that no man passed through and where no man dwelt,"[2] or of "the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited,"[3] is brought home to you.

For when recalling a picture of the lands of the Near East, the prevailing tint is always that produced by vast unbounded stony wastes, staring stretches of yellow sand, leprous patches of saline efflorescence, and gaunt ranges of barren mountains. The awful aridity of Arabia is only too prevalent throughout the thirsty East. But it is because of this intense sterility that verdure when it does appear appeals with a force unfelt perhaps elsewhere. The land is, in fact, a land of contrasts which are startling, almost aggressive, in their suddenness. I know of no sensation which is quite equal to that caused by coming suddenly and unexpectedly, after a long day over a sea of sand under the rays of a burning sun, upon a vision of runlets of bubbling water, terraces of bright green barley, and clumps of shady trees. There is no other contrast that I know of which strikes quite such divergent chords or excites quite such a revulsion of feeling. It is in such moments as these that you learn whence sprang the muse that stirred the Persian poets to give expression to their thoughts, that you understand why it is that gardens in the East are not beds of flowers and ornamental rockeries, but orchards of shady trees and rivulets of crystal water, and that you cease to wonder why it is that fountains of plashing water adorn the courts of princes and the palaces of kings. But proceed a few hundred yards on your way and the scene is changed; go but a step beyond the influence of the water brought

[1] Isa. xxxii. 2. [2] Jer. ii. 6. [3] Jer. xvii. 6.

so laboriously by the hand of man, and you have passed in a moment from life to death. The line is drawn as with a ruler, and until you stumble upon just such another oasis, you journey on through a lifeless wilderness. The oasis may be smaller or larger, but where water fails the result is for ever the same. Verily, as Lord Curzon has so aptly remarked, it is a land where "Nature seems to revel in striking the extreme chords upon her miraculous and inexhaustible gamut of sound."

But there is still another note which is struck by a sojourn in the East—the note of pathos. The sight of failing vitality where once was power and strength is always a sad one, and here in the lands of the Near East time broods heavily over her cities. They look back with the dimmed sight of old age at a youth which has long since fled, and as they peer drowsily into the future they see nought but death hovering near, attendant on life which is all but spent. The heyday of youth is far past, and decay, indecorously encroaching ere life is yet extinct, warns them that they stand trembling on the brink of the grave. When power sits once more on the thrones where Xerxes and Darius ruled, it will not be the power of the East, but an intruder from the more youthful West.

Passing from the Near East into the heart of Asia, so adaptable do you become under stress of the vicissitudes of travel you scarcely feel surprise to find that you are travelling by the aid of steam. Incongruous or not, the train is there, and you accept it as a matter of course and are thankful. In reality, when you come to think it over, it is hopelessly out of place. You may travel all over India by rail and think nothing of it. There there stretch vast networks of iron ways connecting populous towns alive with modern life, where you perceive the spirit of the twentieth century in unquestioned

dominion. But here you have but a single, long, isolated arm stretching from the confines of Europe into the very heart of an ancient continent. Far more even than the plains of Asiatic Turkey or the plateaux of Iran, the vast solitudes of Turkomania or the steppes of Turkestan seem to you a world apart. As you are borne rapidly along you might, indeed, be travelling on some witch's broomstick in a fairy tale. Merve, Queen of the World; Bokhara, the Noble; Samarkand, the capital of Timur, pass before you in quick succession, overwhelming you with the magnitude of their associations. You gaze upon their sights and marvel at the strange stories which they tell, and you mix with their peoples for a while, and then pass on. And when you have passed on and they are no longer before you, you look back upon them as upon the figures of a dream. You may have mixed with them and talked with them, but you are not of them; their world is not your world, nor yours theirs.

I remember strolling through the bazaar of a town in the heart of Turkestan, loitering among the shops and talking to their occupants. I thought after all that they seemed very ordinary people, and not so very different from myself. The same night I was present at a mosque, and before I left I knew that I was wrong. It was no pretentious building,—a plain structure enclosed on three sides by severely simple walls, and open on the fourth to the night. No objection was made to our presence—two Russian gentlemen and myself: we were, in fact, to all intents and purposes, ignored. When a sufficient number had arrived—they were members of a peculiar sect of dervishes—prayers were first intoned, the ends of their white turbans, emblem of the shroud, hanging down, and then a score or more knelt in a circle on the floor. The scene which

followed was absolutely weird. Swaying their bodies frantically backwards and forwards to a common centre, they gasped out the words of some sacred formula. The hands of the clock moved slowly round, but the movement and refrain of that weird circle never ceased. From time to time fresh figures appeared mysteriously out of the night to enlarge the circle. Their arrival was hardly noticeable; one only saw from time to time that the circle had increased. Seated in one corner of the mosque, I became hypnotised as I gazed fascinated at the ceaseless movement and listened to the monotonous refrain gasped out in jerks by its frenzied utterers. So great was the effect it had upon one's senses that when at length, with no word of warning, both sound and movement suddenly ceased, it seemed as though the world itself must have suddenly halted in its course. An interval followed, during which exhortations were read, rich in the flowery hyperbole of the East, until stalwart bearded men sobbed and groaned aloud under stress of their emotion. For an hour or more full play was given them, and then as the last speaker ceased the mysterious circle was formed once more.

Looking back as I left towards midnight, it was to see the devotees working themselves up with the same monotonous repetition to a state of ecstatic exaltation once again. I have seen the howling dervishes at Cairo, and realised as I watched that their performance was for show. This was something different—it was real. As far as we knew, no European had been present there before. Our presence was tolerated, but considered of no account. We were given a glimpse of the strange soul of a people, and as I drove home in the starlight and pondered on what I had seen, I thought I understood why it was that there were even now those

among them who had never set foot in the Russian town, though that town had stood side by side with their own for upwards of thirty years.

But apart from the fascination of the people themselves, there is an indescribable interest in gazing upon the vast store of monuments which abound, and which, if good use has been made of the counsel of Francis Bacon to the traveller to "carry with him also some card or booke describing the country where he travelleth; which will be a good key to his enquiry," will each tell some strange story of the past. The mouldering walls of Geok Teppe tell of the ghastly horror of bloody war; the prison of Bokhara recalls the cold brutality of the inhuman tyrants who once reigned; the unrivalled ruins of Samarkand tell of the greatness of a Tartar king, while the very streets seem to whisper faintly of a magnificence now gone. And to the student of modern history the whole country repeats a tale of the overwhelming advance of a mighty Power from the north.

Arrived at Tashkent, the Russian capital of Turkestan, and finding no railway to take you any farther, you cast about in your mind for some other means of progress, and you learn that the post-road awaits you. Very good. This suggests at any rate speed, and remembering always the part of the world in which you are travelling, perhaps a certain degree of comfort. But I doubt if the reality altogether corresponds to your expectation. The best class of vehicle that is known on the Russian post-road in Asia is the tarantass, and it has no seats, neither has it any springs. The first deficiency is in reality an advantage, because it enables you to wedge yourself in with cushions and rugs between portions of your baggage in a more or less recumbent position; but

the second is a palpable defect which never ceases to force itself upon your attention, more especially since the road for nearly the whole of its length is not a road at all, but merely a track across the steppe: and after you have driven close upon 2500 miles by this means, as I did, it is probable that you will be careful not to repeat the experiment, if by any possible means you can avoid doing so. Let it be at once admitted that travelling on Russian post-roads in Asia is a trial to both mind and body.

Still you must be thankful even for this small mercy, for Russia, unlike our own country, is not small—Siberia alone would comfortably take in the whole of Europe, with a few of its countries thrown in twice over—and there is no danger of your running over the edge in your haste. You may start driving in Russia and go on doing so in a straight line for days, and still find that you are in Russia at the end of them; so I say, be thankful for these same post-roads in that they make travelling possible.

And when you have driven day after day towards the rising of the sun, and have at last reached the bounds of the dominions of the Great White Tsar, what lies before you then? Four million square miles of territory, the home of four hundred million souls, whose delight it is to believe that "there is only one sun in the heavens and only one emperor beneath the sky." A nation with a recorded history of close upon four thousand years; a people that can boast of the oldest civilisation of the world, of an exclusiveness that even now baffles the enterprise of the West, of the distinction of having been responsible for that greatest phantasm of modern times, the Yellow Peril; an empire, finally, which may yet, by involving the Powers of the twentieth-century civilisation in an Armageddon of

nations, be the cause of the greatest cataclysm which the world has known.

I only peeped at the mysteries which lie behind that veil,—to probe them would exhaust a lifetime,—gazed curiously for a moment at the Chinaman and his works, enjoyed some of the sport which his country so generously provides, and then hurried north to see something of the surprising railway which the will of a single man caused to be built across a continent. An imperial pen traced a memorandum on the report of a vice-governor-general,[1] a special conference of ministers was summoned, a special commission received orders to make surveys, and the great Trans-Siberian railway came into being. In May 1891 his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Tsesarievitch emptied a wheelbarrow of earth on the embankment of the future Ussuri line and laid the first stone for the construction of the Siberian railway: at the present time (1904) the traveller may step into his carriage at Moscow, and, with the exception of the short break at present necessitated by the passage of the Baikal, travel by rail, amid a luxury unsurpassed in any other portion of the globe, the whole way to Vladivostok, Port Arthur, or Peking. With a stroke of the pen the terrors of Siberia have been swept aside, and the capital of the Celestial Empire has been brought within nineteen days of London.

Such is the aspect which Asia wears for the traveller.

[1] On a report drawn up in 1885-1886 by Count Ignatieff, the late Tsar traced with his own hand the following resolution: "I have read many reports of the governors-general of Siberia, and must own with grief and shame that until now the Government has done scarcely anything towards satisfying the needs of this rich but neglected country. It is time, high time!" For details of the preliminary steps to the construction of the railway see the 'Official Guide to the Great Siberian Railway,' published by the Ministry of Ways and Communications.

But it can show another face. Those strange agglomerations of sterile wastes and smiling oases, with their mouldering cities and unfathomable peoples,—Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Turkestan, China, and Tibet,—familiar to a large majority but in name, possess for a few a deep significance, and I have no hesitation in admitting that it is in the part which each is playing, or is destined to play, in the great silent struggle for supremacy in Asia which is even at the present moment engaging a far greater share of the attention and of the resource of the statesmen of the world than is apparent on the surface, that I find an interest far surpassing all other.

For it is hither, to the promising theatre where still survive on doubtful equilibrium the decaying kingdoms of the East, that the Powers of the West are driven by forces altogether beyond control, for the furtherance of their ambitions, and it is here in the end that the fierce struggle for supremacy between representatives of two of the great divisions of mankind—the Slavonic and the Teutonic—must find its issue. The progress of events and the march of time serve only to make it daily more apparent to the observant, that in the continent of Asia lies the stage whereon the fate of empires will be sealed and their destinies fulfilled.

The story of the return of the peoples of the West to those lands wherein was situated the first home and cradle of their race is one of absorbing interest, and may be said to have had its origin with the rise of a man who, born in a little kingdom occupying the south-west corner of Europe, was destined to set in motion a movement which even at the present day can scarce be said to have run its course, and which has already played a determining part in the destinies of the world. For it is to Prince Henry of Portugal, known to history

as Prince Henry the Navigator, that must be assigned the responsibility for the great movement of discovery of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, as a result of which, to use the words of his biographer,[1] "India has been conquered, America repeopled, the world made clear, and the civilisation which the Roman Empire left behind has conquered or utterly overshadowed every one of its old rivals and superiors—Islam, India, China, Tartary."

So it happens that it was the little kingdom of Portugal that first set rolling the ball of conquest from Europe to Asia, when her intrepid mariner Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and sailed into the eastern seas; and it was the same kingdom that planted the first seeds of the future expansion of modern Europe in the Orient, when her conquering genius Albuquerque the Great laid hold of the outposts of the East and raised his standards in Hindustan. Upwards of four centuries have rolled by since Bartholomew Diaz first showed to Vasco da Gama and his successors the way round the Southern Cape, and with them the brilliant though transitory period of Portuguese supremacy. The ever-revolving wheel of fortune has played truant to her former love, and all that now remain to mark the prowess of the pioneers are the crippled forts which frown down from the forbidding heights of Muscat, and that "monument of Chinese toleration and Portuguese tenacity," Macao, which for three hundred years was for foreigners the gate of the Chinese Empire, but which has been described at the present time as being not even an inspiring monument to the memory of a glory which is gone.

The scene is changed; the actors are not the same;

[1] C. R. Beazley in his 'Henry the Navigator.'

but the drama which is being played to-day is the evolution of the curtain-raiser which heralded the entrance of modern players on an ancient stage, and the stage, albeit adapted somewhat to the requirements of altered conditions, is the same stage upon which the grandees of Portugal rang up the curtain to an applauding and astonished world four centuries ago.

The actors, I have said, are not the same. Not even the innate inertia and lethargy of the Slav proved proof against the ambitious spirit of unrest awaked in Europe, and slowly, though for this very reason perhaps the more surely, the growing Power of Moscow bestirred itself, and looked out with inquiring gaze across the vast and unknown lands that rolled away from the threshold of its own domain into the dim distance of the mysterious East. Less than a century after the first exploits of the Portuguese discoverers, Russia had set out upon that path which has since led her the length of a continent. The trail of the Slav across Asia from the west is the natural complement of the fiery invasions of Jengis Khan and Timur from the East; the results of the former are likely to prove equal, if not to surpass, in importance — certainly in permanency — those of the latter, though the methods employed to obtain them have been different. For while the thundering tread of armies and the smell of battle and of fire, the wail of the widow and the cry of anguish of the vanquished, are the dominating features of the one, the slow and irresistible advance of a *people* is the leading aspect of the other. Episodes of violence there have been, as the records of the holocaust of Geok Teppe, or of the frenzied garrison who rang a bloody tocsin so lately as 1900 at Blagoveschensk, proclaim; but episodes such as these, though casting a lurid light

across the path of the Russian advance, appear but details when examined in true perspective in a correct presentation of the achievements of three centuries. Russian soldiers, Russian sappers, and Russian engineers have moved forward, it is true, but more than this, the Russian peasant has moved forward too; and it should never be forgotten in dealing with the Russian advance across Asia that whereas it is only "diplomats and statesmen, who must deal with temporary situations, that need be deeply concerned with the purely military advance of any nation, when a people move forward it is a circumstance of world-wide significance, and it is of especial and practical concern to every people upon whose interests that advance impinges, or whose future in any direction that advance affects." [1] Russia has come to the Pacific, and she has come to stay.

It is Russia, then, whom we see in the title-*rôle* in Northern Asia. It should be hardly necessary to add, even for the benefit of the most casual Englishman, that ever since the days of "the Great Commoner" it is the star of Britain that has been in the ascendant throughout the south. A strong cast, it must be admitted, with England and Russia in the leading parts, and America, Japan, Germany, and France (with Belgium understudying one of the two leading performers) starred as the lesser lights upon the bill. And the *dénoûment* will be in every way worthy of the players.

How is it with the two leading lights? Is it community of interest or irreconcilable antagonism that characterises their mutual progress? It would be absurd to attempt to deny that the two forces which are of chief account in shaping the course of

[1] The Russian Advance. A. J. Beveridge.

RUSSIAN EMIGRANTS FOR THE FAR EAST.

events in Asia are actuated by motives diametrically opposed. The policy of the one has for its object the opening of fields to the commerce of the world, and political and strategic supremacy in such parts as are of vital importance to the safeguarding of her existing dominions and those lines of communication which stretch from one part of the empire to another; that of the other territorial aggrandisement, closed markets, and political prestige.

It may be perfectly true that a century ago his most gracious Majesty King George III. remarked, on bidding farewell to the Russian ambassador Count Worontzoff, that it would be necessary to take leave of common-sense, and to enter into the world of chimeras, to suppose that there could exist any alliance in the world more natural or more solid than that between Russia and Great Britain; that as their geographical position, which was the basis of their union, could not change, their union should be eternal. But if so, it is equally true that in this instance, at any rate, his Majesty showed a serious deficiency of foresight, for the very thing which he supposed impossible has come to pass — their geographical position has changed. Great Britain in India has become a Continental nation. Russia has since that day annexed a whole series of territories, which may without exaggeration be described as the heart of a continent. A whole congeries of independent states have one after another been absorbed, until at the present time the thousands of square miles which, in the days of King George, separated Russian and British dominion have been reduced to a mere strip in comparison, comprising the kingdoms of Persia and Afghanistan and the Chinese dependency of Tibet. At one point, indeed, in the shadowy

region of the Pamirs, Russian territory may be said to be coterminous with our own, though here, thanks to natural physical causes, we can afford to regard with equanimity the presence even of so powerful a neighbour as Russia, for, as Sir Thomas Holdich so pertinently puts it, "an independent untouched Kafirstan is about as solid an obstacle between ourselves and the Oxus basin as could well have been devised, as indeed Tamerlane found and recorded for the benefit of his successors."[1]

If the policy as laid down by Tsar Nicholas I. had been carried out, a policy which had for its object the prevention of the possibility of conflict between two Powers "who to remain united require to remain separated," by scrupulously preserving the peaceful condition of the intermediate countries, by consolidating the tranquillity of these countries, by confining the rivalry to commerce, and by refraining from engaging in a struggle for political influence, — above all, *by respecting the independence of the intervening countries*, then the whole question of Anglo-Russian relations might have presented an entirely different aspect to what it does to-day. But the policy was doomed from the first. Russia, defeated in her endeavour to become possessed of the keys of the Bosphorus, turned her eyes eastward, for there, through the little-considered kingdoms of the Near East, might she not find a backway that would lead to the goal upon which her heart was set?

Incidentally a great field presented itself for the civilising influence of a Christian Power; law and order were held in defiance in the countries which bordered on her own, each step forward necessitated another to teach a lesson to the wild peoples who

[1] The Indian Borderland.

successively became her neighbours, and so Transcaspia, Turkomania, Merve, Bokhara, Ferghana, and Zerafshan —the countries whose independence was to be so scrupulously respected—fell before the armies or the diplomatists of the Great White Tsar. At the same time there arose a man who breathed new life into the dry bones of Russian expansion and colonisation in the Far East, and from the day when Count Muravieff pricked the bubble of Chinese greatness, which had so dazzled the timid parties to the treaty of Nertchinsk, the forward trend of her policy has continued unchecked, till now at the present day she frowns haughtily across the waters of the China Seas, and stands menacingly with fixed bayonet within striking distance of Peking itself.

On whom lies the blame? Hardly upon Russia, whose chief crime is repeated success. Indeed I shall be the first to pay tribute to the great work which she has done in the interests of civilisation wherever she has come in contact with the uncultured and barbarous hordes of Central Asia. Rather, if we have allowed another Power to acquire a position and a prestige which is harmful to ourselves, or to usurp a preponderating influence in the affairs of those States which still enjoy a precarious independence as buffers between the two nations, should we not look to our own inaction in the past? And if we do, we are bound to admit that it is the fruits of the much-vaunted policy of masterly inactivity,—a synonym for pitiable neglect,—which held so long and so disastrous a term of power, that we are reaping at the present day.

There is little to be gained by indulging in useless lamentation for the past. We cannot undo what is already an accomplished fact, but we may learn wisdom from the lessons of history, and benefit therefrom as we

set our faces to the future. What has to be faced by the present generation is the fact that Russia is there; what has to be realised is that "the policy of masterly inactivity, admirably well adapted to the circumstances of an Asiatic kingdom standing alone, remote from Russia, and far apparently beyond the zone of Russian ambition, becomes inarticulate folly when applied to an Asiatic kingdom contiguous to and leaning on Russia."[1] The all-important question which sooner or later must be answered is, How long can Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet, and, if we take the broadest view of the whole question, China, maintain even the precarious title to independence to which they can at the present time lay claim?

The rapidly increasing importance of the problem of Asia to the British people was painted in vivid colours by the present Viceroy of India in the course of a speech delivered at Calcutta on March 25, 1903. "Europe," he pointed out, "has woke up, and is beginning to take a revived interest in Asia. Russia, with her vast territories, her great ambitions, and her unarrested advance, has been the pioneer of this movement, and with her, or after her, have come her competitors, rivals, and allies. Thus, as all these foreigners arrive upon the scene, and push forward into the vacant spots, we are slowly having a European situation created in Asia with the same figures upon the stage. . . . In Europe we are a maritime Power, who are merely called upon to defend our own shores from invasion, and who are confronted by no land dangers or foes. In Asia we have both a seaboard and a land frontier many thousands of miles in length, and though Providence has presented us on some

[1] Malleson's 'History of Afghanistan.' I have substituted the words "an Asiatic kingdom" for the "Afghanistan" of the original.

portion of our land frontiers with the most splendid natural defences in the world, yet the situation must become more, and not less, anxious as rival or hostile influences creep up to these ramparts, and as the ground outside them becomes the arena of new combinations, and the field of unforeseen ambitions."

Is the true significance of the situation, thus set forth, realised by the English public? Is the vital importance of preserving India from attack even dimly felt by the people of Great Britain? And still more, is the importance of her position on the line of these communications, which are the binding links not only between Great Britain and her vast commercial interests in the Far East, but also between Great Britain and her colonies of Australia and New Zealand, adequately appreciated? There are Powers who would give much to occupy positions of advantage on the flank of these same lines of communication, these throbbing nerves of empire.

I have ventured to express the opinion—an opinion based upon personal investigation on the scene of action itself, as well as upon the writings of others competent to pronounce upon such questions—that an undefined and vacillating policy in Asia is detrimental to our position throughout the world, and inconsonant with our high place in the councils of the nations; and if the hope which I entertain, that a perusal of these pages may, in however small a degree, incite the reader to an increased interest in the problems which confront our country in the East, and may help, however imperfectly, to expose the fatuity of the policy of those who are perpetually belittling the consequences of a precipitate flight before the aggressive advance of other nations, and who, with no doubt the best intentions, would have us give way at all costs before the

ambitions, both expressed and implied, of those who are, and must remain, our rivals in Asia, be in any way fulfilled, my object in writing them will have been obtained.

Let the people of this country—and by the people of this country I do not mean the select few who have made a study of such questions—understand that a policy of unsupported diplomatic protest will not always prove efficient in retaining that position of supremacy in Southern Asia which is vital to our being, and let them be prepared, should it ever be asked of them, to enforce respect for their legitimate demands by a display of unmistakable intention. There is a fund of wisdom in the five short words, *si vis pacem, para bellum*, and it is a wisdom which we shall do well to recognise.

TURKEY IN ASIA

A land without any order,—
  Day even as night (one saith),
Where who lieth down ariseth not,
  Nor the sleeper awakeneth;
A land of darkness as darkness itself
  And of the shadow of death."

—DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
  Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

—PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

CHAPTER II.

THE GATEWAY OF THE EAST.

Constantinople—The romance of the city on the Golden Horn—The reality—Monuments of interest—The gulf between Europe and Asia—Peculiarities of the East—The Haider-Pasha Ismid railway—A climb to the Anatolian plateau—Lack of comfort on the present Anatolian railway—Probabilities of the future—Konia—Its streets—Improvement in the district under the administration of Ferhit Pasha.

CONSTANTINOPLE!

What a whirl of thought the word awakens! What stirring scenes it conjures up of wild romance and strange vicissitude! It would indeed be strange if imagination were not fired or the pulses quickened on approaching the far-famed Turkish capital. For from the day, two thousand five hundred and sixty-nine years ago, when the enterprising little band of Greeks propelled their galleys up the Hellespont and landed on the shores of the Golden Horn to build their town, in obedience to the Delphic oracle, "over against the city of the blind," up to the present time, when an Eastern potentate sits on the throne of the emperors of Byzantium, the stronghold of the gateway of two continents, whether as Byzantium, New Rome, or Constantinople, has at all times woven a spell of fascination over the minds of men, and burned for itself in the scroll of history—as no

doubt the Emperor Constantine intended that it should when he erected the golden milestone from which all the distances of the eastern world were in future to be measured—an indelible reputation as the very eye and centre of the world.

There is no need for apology, then, in admitting that, as I was borne rapidly towards the city on the Bosphorus, of which with far more reason than of Venice might it be said that—

> "Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee,
> And was the safeguard of the West"—

the views presented by the frost-bound lands of Central Europe and the rugged mountains of the Turkish highlands sank into insignificance before the varying scenes of the ever-changing mental picture which unrolled itself before me. Visions of the early days of splendour of a city standing proud and alone, "with all Europe behind and all Asia before," a home of prodigal magnificence and luxury, despite disastrous inroads from time to time of the legions of Persia, Greece, and Macedon; of the gloomy days of depression when the dark shadow of the great Power which had arisen in the West stole over the kingdoms of the East; of the rise of a fallen city to a height of power and magnificence hitherto unknown, as the capital of the east Roman empire under Constantine and his successors; of gradual decay with the decline and fall of the power of Rome, passing into the final collapse of the longest lived empire that Christendom has known when the Emperor Constantine XIV. fell gallantly fighting in the breach of the walls of his city; and of a new era of barbaric splendour ushered in from the time when an Osmanli Sultan seized upon the city, and the cry "God is great and

Mohammed is His prophet!" rang through the dome of the great church which had stood for thirty generations a monument of the greatness and piety of its founder, Justinian,—passed in bewildering succession before me, till at length, as we drew up alongside of the platform of the station of Stambul, I was ready to exclaim, in the words of the old king Athanarich, "Now do I at last behold what I had often heard and deemed incredible."

Alas for all our dreams! The glitter of my mental picture was not there: the reality was depressing in comparison. Dull grey-looking buildings loomed indistinctly through mist as I was driven over execrable streets to the European quarter of the town. The rock walls of the Bosphorus, undoubtedly one of the most striking water passages in the world, were but faintly outlined through falling rain. Even in the faces of its people was to be seen a reflex of the city's mournful guise, for there was apparent in them that gloom which is begotten of a long and strenuous fast. Ramazan was at its height. Of course it was all my own fault, as every fresh acquaintance took good care to impress upon me, and I listened patiently to the reiterated assertion that December was not the time of year to see the beauties of Constantinople. The worst of bad weather, however, is powerless to divest the Hippodrome, with its bronze pillar celebrating the victory of Platæa, of its historic interest, or the burnt column on whose continued existence depends according to popular superstition the life of the Ottoman Empire, or the museum which guards the relics of some of the earliest known races of mankind, or the great arches of massive masonry which sustain a water-channel enumerated by the versatile anatomist

of Melancholy among the aqueducts of the world,[1] and till lately the sole water-supply of the capital. Nor could cold and damp check the flood of admiration which swept over me at sight of the noble proportions and unadorned magnificence of the Mosque of St Sophia, or stifle the half-involuntary thrill which assailed me as I saw here, in the great church of Justinian, a multitude now bow down as one man at the word of a priest of Islam.

But it was not with a view to studying Constantinople, still less to writing about it, that I left England early in December 1902 and travelled with all the speed and comfort afforded by the "Orient Express" from one extremity of Europe to the other. The object which I had in view was destined to carry me farther afield than the tourist-trodden streets of Stambul, and after a short stay beneath the hospitable roof of the British embassy, I turned my back upon the West and passed through the great gateway of the East.

Landing on the farther shore of the Bosphorus, your first reflection is probably that a few minutes have sufficed to transfer you from one continent to another, and your second that Asia here differs in no way from Europe there. The reason is simple. For centuries the tide of conquest flowed ever backward and forward between East and West, each wave leaving its mark ere it receded from the shore. The armies of the turbid races of the East—Persians, Arabs, Seljuks, Mongols, Tartars, and Turkomans—followers of men whose names are writ large in a momentous page of history,—Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes; Harun-al-Raschid, Moslemah, and Motassem; Toghrul Bey, Alp Arslan, and Suleiman; Timur the Tartar and the

[1] In 'The Anatomy of Melancholy,' by R. Burton.

Turkoman Uzun Hassan,—rolled in successive waves from the East to be hurled tumultuously against the portals of the west; while from time to time and with varying success the colonies or legions of Athens, Sparta, Macedon, Gaul, Rome, and Byzantium, the fervid bands of the crusaders, and the enterprising traders of Genoa and Venice, streamed across the dividing gulf, and raised the standards of the West among the empires of the East. Finally, fate and the conquering genius of the Osmanli Muhammed II. set up on the threshold of Europe the stronghold of an Asian power, which endures unto this day, and which, ignoring the arbitrary line of map-makers, confronts you with the East before you are well quit of the West. So there are bazaars, and mosques, and swarthy-visaged easterns on the western shore; but there are also telegraphs and railways — and Germans—to remind you of Europe on the East.

But despite all signs of prosy Western commerce, the atmosphere is perceptibly of the East. You look at your watch; it is mid-day. You glance at the station clock—if there is one—and you observe that the hands point to 7.30. You ask for an explanation, and you learn that in Turkey sunset is twelve o'clock, that the sun set at 4.30 (European time) the day before, that it is now nineteen and a half hours after sunset, and that the hands of the clock therefore point to 7.30! You digest this as soon as you can, make a note of it for future occasion, and wonder vaguely if you will ever remember to make the necessary daily alteration to keep time with the sun.

I looked at my watch after an early crossing of the Bosphorus on the morning of December 17, and found that it wanted a few minutes to six, so that if the information I had received in Constantinople to the effect

that the train was due to leave at 1.30 was correct, we were due to start almost immediately. But it was not —which fact reminded me that I was in the East. Making my way through the deserted station, dimly lit by a flickering oil-lamp, I knocked up a sleepy official, who indignantly informed me that the train would leave at 2.30 (7 A.M.). He was quite wrong; it did not leave until 3.30 (8 A.M.), though this was admittedly an hour after the advertised time. Punctuality is at a discount when the world of Islam keeps high fast.

For the first four hours the train steams gaily along the coast to Ismid, after which it plunges desperately into a labyrinth of mountain glens and sullen defiles, to emerge panting later on, 3000 feet higher than when it started, on the edge of a highland plateau. The remaining distance to Konia lies across as uninteresting an expanse as you can well wish to see, which presents no greater feature in Anatolia than barren plateaux do in any other part of the world — Tibet for instance. Little need be said of the existing arrangements on the line except that consideration for the comfort of passengers played no part in determining them. The first day of about twelve hours is occupied in a struggle to reach Eski Sher, where one is permitted to rest in such comfort as the accommodation afforded by the hotel allows until 4 A.M., when the remaining journey of fifteen hours over a monotonous table-land is begun. By 7.30 P.M. Konia will be reached, and the weary traveller will find a welcome at the Greek inn, a few minutes' walk from the station, which he will probably sum up as even less inviting than the hotel at Eski Sher. Luncheon on the first day can be obtained at Ismid, and on the second at Afium Kara Hissar, five and three-quarter hours beyond Eski Sher. This ser-

vice, however, in view of the probable consummation of the Baghdad railway scheme, may be looked upon as temporary: when the *train de luxe*, which is now in course of construction with a view to future eventualities, is in use, all this will be changed.

Konia, the present terminus of the railway, is a scattered town of about 40,000 inhabitants, and capital of a vilâyet, though for the moment government-house was untenanted, the *vali*, Ferhit Pasha, having left to take up his duties as president of the Macedonian Reform Committee, while his successor Tewfic Pasha had not arrived. I found the *tekke* of the Mevlevi dervishes, which contains the tombs of Hazret Meviana, the founder of the order, and of his successors, and a semi-ruined building with a ceiling of beautiful enamel tile-work, a worthy rival of the renowned specimens of Samarkand, the objects of chief interest; but on the whole I was not greatly edified by a morning's wandering in the town, and after persevering through a succession of filthy lanes and alleys, was quite ready to agree with the genial companion of my walk, that in Konia it would be superfluous to name the streets,—there was, of course, no thought of doing so,—one knew them by their smells!

It is only fair while speaking of Konia to mention in passing how greatly the whole district has benefited under the enlightened rule of the late governor, though I observed that an excellent scheme of irrigation, propounded by him some years ago, had, so far, proceeded no farther than the brain of its deserving originator, lack of funds no doubt forming a formidable bar to its practical application.

CHAPTER III.

ACROSS THE TAURUS.

Difficulties of travel in the winter—An Eastern *road*—The Axylon plateau—Off the road at night—Eregli—Through the Taurus mountains—The defile at Bozanti—A pleasant Christmas!—A silver mine—Death of a *kaimakam*—Bad weather—The Cilician Gates—An ancient highway of nations—The *tracé* of the future railway *not* through the Gates—Reach the Cilician plain and Mersina.

ANY one who undertakes under existing circumstances to travel from Konia to the Cilician plain in the depth of winter must not expect to find the experience a pleasurable one. In the event of his being overtaken by continuous bad weather, as I was, he will find it a journey productive of a minimum of pleasure and a maximum of discomfort. The road—where there is any—is sufficiently bad to preclude the possibility of proceeding at anything better than a walk; the only shelters in which to spend the night are miserable hovels, affording no conveniences beyond the walls, roof, and, as a rule, mud floor, infested by vermin and indescribably filthy; and, finally, if unprovided with cooking-pots, washing-basin, and whatsoever else confers upon life a modicum of comfort, the traveller will have to content himself with whatever food his foresight may happen to have provided him with, cooked in the unsavoury and uninviting-looking utensil that will be offered him, and to look forward to a succession of days

A TURKISH ROAD.

with an entire dispensation from ablutions. Fowls and eggs, it is true, may be obtained in the villages on the Konia plateau, but in winter, when the rigours of climate have driven away the encampments of nomads, which are to be found in the mountains during the summer months, nothing can be expected from the dilapidated *khans* which serve for stages on the main artery of communication between the desert uplands of Western Anatolia and the lowlands of Cilicia and Mesopotamia beyond.

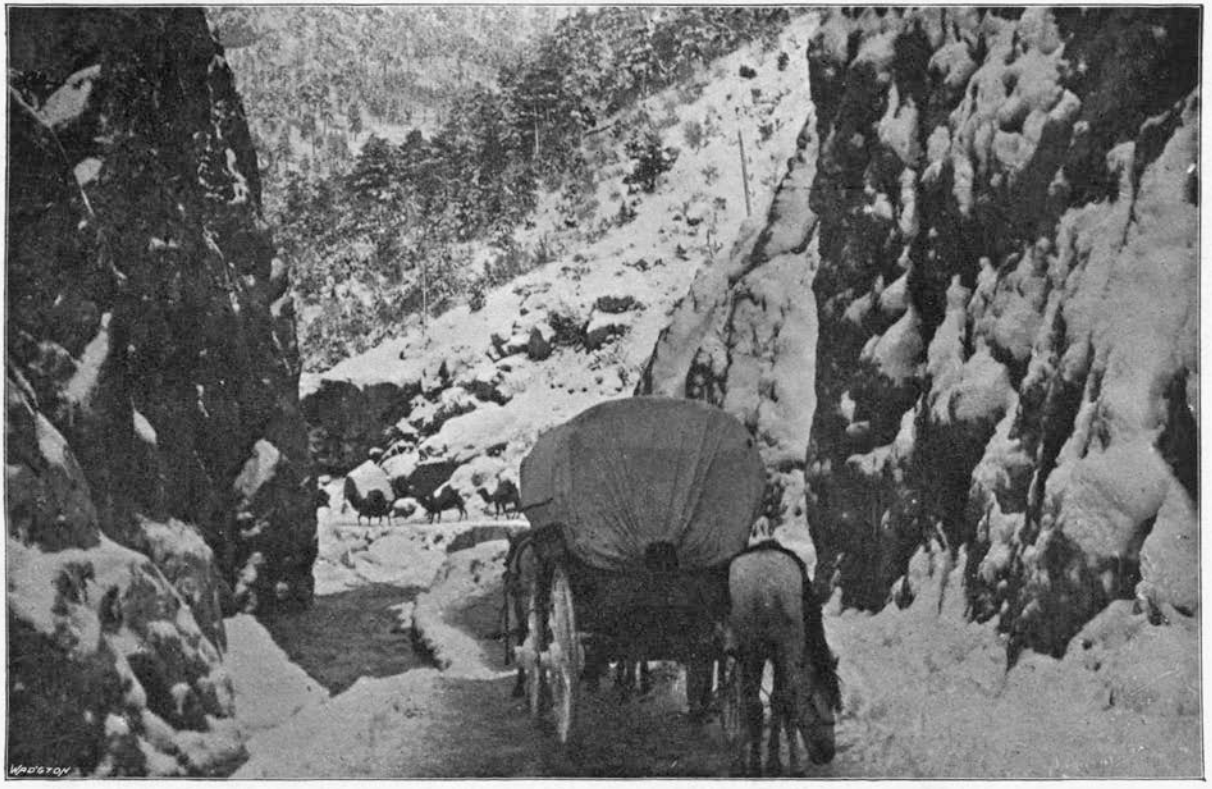
When I left Konia by carriage on the morning of December the 20th I had not the benefit of the experience which I was so shortly to acquire, and I accepted thankfully and literally the information that there was a passable road the whole of the way. There is, however, one road of the West and another of the East, and it very soon became evident that the road in question was essentially and unmistakably of the latter. That is to say, there was no road at all; but we just drove over the plain in the direction of our objective, following more or less faithfully, according to circumstances, the tracks of others who had gone before. In this case, Eregli, a village at the foot of the Bulgar Dagh Mountains, was our objective, with the villages of Ismil and Kara Bunar as intermediate points.

The south-eastern corner of the great highland plateau, known as the Axylon, presents a picture of mournful desolation. An arid and dessicated expanse for one-half of the year, it becomes in winter a sea of mud, producing to all appearances, where it produces anything at all, a crop of sorry-looking camel-thorn, such life as there is being presented by small strings of camels that pass with silent ghostly tread, and here and there by a small clump of miserable little houses, dignified by the title of village.

On the second day of my journey across this uninviting stretch, night came down to find us still ploughing through the snow, and I was not in the least surprised to hear about 6 P.M. that we were off the *road!* To complicate matters, the horses of the conveyance, with my Persian servant[1] and the luggage, now gave in, and could in no way be induced to move another step. All round darkness and a driving snowstorm, and the situation was sufficiently depressing. Fortunately one of my escort of *zaptiehs*, who had galloped off to reconnoitre, returned ere long, having found the track, and taking Joseph in with me and leaving the cart with the beaten horses until such time as we might be able to send assistance, set off once more, reaching Kara Bunar eventually without further mishap.

As the road approaches Eregli all thought of following even the footsteps of those who have gone before has to be abandoned, since the plain develops into a very tolerable snipe-bog. Through this my driver plunged with stolid oriental composure, turning neither to the right nor to the left, supremely indifferent to the vagaries of the conveyance as it was dragged along, now sunk above the axles in mud and water, now balanced at an angle which threatened every moment to end in total collapse, and it was vastly to my surprise and in complete defiance of all the laws of gravity that we did eventually reach our destination in an upright position. The village of Eregli, on the fringe of the

[1] Joseph Abbas, a native of Tabriz, who has however for long resided in England. He first became associated with Englishmen on the Russo-Afghan Boundary Commission in 1885. Before that time he had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, and has since talked with the followers of the murdered Englishman Dalgleish in the heart of Turkestan. The story of his travels would indeed fill many volumes, and I gladly take this opportunity of acknowledging the faithful service which he accorded me during the whole of my journey, till I reached civilisation once more on the Siberian Railway.



THROUGH THE TAURUS MOUNTAINS.

Axylon plain, is a tolerably large one of 4000 or 5000 inhabitants, occupying houses of sun-dried bricks, which are in many instances surrounded by well-watered gardens and orchards.

The remark which appears at this point in the route-book of Asia Minor, to the effect that "some care" has been bestowed on the araba-road, will evoke a smile at the humour of the writer or a sigh of regret at the poor return there is to show for the care bestowed, according to the credulity of the reader! It is, however, possible that my driver took me straight across country to Ulukishla, or that the sentence in the route-book was intended to apply to the road beyond that place, for it was not until we were a mile or more beyond it that we got into anything that could by any possible stretch of imagination be termed a made road.[1]

From this point we entered the Bulgar Dagh, and for the remainder of the way to Tarsus passed through the magnificent mountain scenery afforded by the frowning peaks and precipitous defiles of the rugged Taurus range. The wild grandeur of some of the gorges through which the road passes is striking in the extreme, notably the narrow passage between perpendicular walls of naked rock which gives access to the vale of Bozanti, and which I have no hesitation in admitting impressed me to a greater extent than did even the world-famed defile known to history as the pass of the Cilician Gates. At the southern end of

[1] It is, as Lord Curzon has remarked, due either to "the poverty or the tyranny of the English vocabulary" that one is obliged to use the word road in describing the communications of the East. Roads in reality, in our sense of the word, except where introduced by European enterprise, may be said to be non-existent in Asia. Cf. Lord Percy: "The road after passing the Kara Dagh is a marvel even for Turkey. According to Murray's handbook it is just passable for carriages throughout, but if any vehicle ever accomplished the feat, it must have been at the cost of the lives of its occupants."—Notes from a Diary in Asiatic Turkey.

this passage stands Ak Keupri, the "white bridge" over the Tchakid Su, and a miserable *khan*. Here I spent Christmas night, and can corroborate the statement lately made by Professor Ramsay that the new *khan* which has been built in the course of the last few years at the north end of the bridge "is, if possible, dirtier and more miserable than the old *khans* on this route."[1] The fire which I lit in the centre of the hovel soon melted the accumulated snow on the roof, which thenceforward dripped steadily through, while a biting wind whistled shrilly through the many chinks in the thin wood wall.

A short distance before reaching the defile as one approaches from the west stands the guard-house of Chifte Khan, from which runs a road to Bulgar Maden, where a silver-mine is worked under the direction of a *kaimakam*, the output amounting to two pony-loads a-week, according to the information which I was given on the spot. The *chaussé* leading to it was the delight of the *kaimakam* of Marash, to whose energy and progressive ideas its construction was due. I say *was*, because—tragic example of the irony of fate—it was while inspecting the very work of which he was so justly proud that he met his death, being pitched over one of the precipices which he had spent his time in rendering passable a few weeks before I passed through.

After crossing the Tchakid Su by the bridge at Ak Keupri, the road runs south-east, and later on south, passing first through a fine glen, and then ascending to a small open tableland known as the Tekir Plateau, at an altitude of about 4300 feet, 20 kilometres from Ak Keupri. And it is to the summit of this small plateau that the evolution of modern warfare has trans-

[1] Journal R.G.S., October 1903.

ferred the true line of defence from the narrow neck of the Cilician Gates, whose perpendicular walls of rock rise high on either side of the road a few miles to the south. The bad weather which had pursued me the whole way showed no improvement as I drove through the celebrated Gates, and I saw nothing consequently but a blurred picture of perpendicular walls of rock through flakes of falling snow. Professor Ramsay describes the passage as a narrow cleft piercing the front wall of the main mass of Taurus: "The actual passage of the Gates is about 100 yards long. On both sides the rock walls rise almost perpendicularly (that on the west side literally so, at one point to about 100 feet above the road), and then slope steeply back towards the towering summit of the ridge. A mediæval castle crowns the western summit, evidently a relic of the long frontier warfare between Byzantine and Saracen power, 641-965 A.D." [1] In the same paper he points out the falsity of the legend that Ibrahim Pasha widened the passage, which before was too narrow to admit of two loaded camels passing one another, recalling the fact that "a road practical for waggons traversed the Gates at least as early as 400 B.C.," while his own estimate of the width of the defile corresponds exactly with that of Kinneir, who when traversing it in 1812, before Ibrahim's day, described it as not more than ten or twelve paces in the narrowest part. It may further be pointed out that there remains a rock inscription on either side of the pass dating from a period many hundreds of years prior to the time of Ibrahim.

So much for this ancient highway of nations, which has resounded with the tramp of the armies of Cyrus, Alexander, Cicero, Harun-al-Raschid, and Ibrahim

[1] Journal R.G.S., October 1903.

Pasha, and literally rung with the clash of arms during the prolonged era of Byzantine and Arab conflict. It must be with a sigh of regret that the sentimental learn that its day of greatness has all but run its course, since, contrary to popular supposition, its importance as a highway is not destined to be revived by the passage of an iron way, which will leave the present road at Ak Keupri and descend to the Cilician plain by the gorge of the Tchakid Su. But of this I shall have more to say later on in a chapter devoted to a discussion of the railway question.

After leaving the defile the road passes down a glen, through superb mountain scenery, and finally debouches on to the plain from among the low foothills of Taurus, a mile or two from the nearest point on the Mersina-Tarsus-Adana Railway, which runs from the coast eastward to the capital, over a distance of forty-one miles. From here another three miles brought me to Tarsus, whence I took train to Mersina, glad enough after the discomfort of my eight days' journey through the Taurus to avail myself of the kind hospitality extended to me by the British Consul, Colonel Massy.

CHAPTER IV.

CILICIA.

Cilicia, ancient and modern—Mersina, a typical seaport of the Near East—Natural disadvantages as a port—The ancient harbour of Tarsus—The ruins at Soli Pompeiopolis—St Paul's Institute at Tarsus—Course of the Cydnus diverted by Justinian—The Dinck Tash—Fallacy of the legend that it is the tomb of Sardanapalus—Relics at Tarsus—The site of the ancient capital—Adana, capital of Cilicia—Description of—Population of—The American mission—Turkish rule—Want of public works—Instances of official corruption—The cotton industry—Climate—Leave Adana—Ruined castles—A gorgeous sunset—Nature of Eastern Cilicia—Across the Giaour Dagh—Excavations at Zingerli—Reach Aleppo.

THE Cilician Plain consists of two distinct halves: the western plain, a flat, low-lying expanse of rich stoneless loam, bounded on the south by the sea, on the west and north by the Taurus Mountains, and on the east by the Jebel Nur, which divides it from the eastern plain. The latter, known also as the Chukur Ova, is likewise bounded on the north by Taurus, while on the east it is shut in by the range of the Giaour Dagh, known to the ancients as Amanus. The whole of the eastern plain is broken by low hills, the Jebel Nur and the foothills which run up to Taurus and the Giaour Dagh, and is in parts marshy. Both parts can boast of ancient cities and ruins which speak of an early civilisation, such as Tarsus in the western and Anazarba in the eastern plain; but the Anazarba of to-day retains

none of the importance with which it was once invested as the capital of Cilicia Secunda in the days of Augustus and Tiberius; nor can there be much resemblance between the ancient Tarsus of a million inhabitants and the moderate town which bears that name to-day. Nevertheless, though the glory has departed never to return, Cilicia may yet rise again from the depths of obscurity to which it has fallen, and claim for itself in the future some small share of attention from the merchant and politician.

At the present time, judged by the modern standards of trade and commerce, Mersina may be considered the town of chief importance, since it is the seaport through which pass the imports to and exports from the district, while Tarsus and Adana, the capital of the province and centre of administration, rank next, being connected with the coast by rail. In the event of the trans-continental rail being constructed as at present designed, the importance of Adana will increase, while Tarsus, deprived of the command of the one great artery of communication with the interior, must dwindle in proportion, and Mersina, should a more suitable harbour be found at the terminus of a branch from the main line to the coast, sink into comparative insignificance. For the time being, however, whatever may be its future fate, Mersina flourishes, and it was to Mersina that I hurried as soon as the somewhat scanty service of the M.T.A. railway admitted of my doing so.

Arrived here, I found a typical seaport town of the Near East. A central thoroughfare, enclosed on either side by the familiar shops of an oriental bazaar, which have the appearance of little square boxes with one side knocked out; the vendors squatting idly among their wares, which are displayed on a counter filling

the open side of the box and as often as not straying down into the street in front, consisting largely of fruit and vegetables, bread and a variety of native delicacies; here and there on the shady side of the street a little knot of men, seated on what ought to be the pavement, engaged in a game of dice or cards amid a group of interested onlookers,—the whole centre of the thoroughfare filled during the day with a polyglot collection of leisurely humanity, strolling ever backwards and forwards, with the infinitely superior air of those in whose calculations of life time has found no place, among whom camels, ponies, and donkeys, laden with the various products of the country, pick their way with stoical indifference. Passing through this central bazaar, an open space, which with a stretch of imagination may be dubbed a square, will be found, in the centre of which a caravan of camels may perhaps be seen; while beyond this again on the outskirts of the town little enclosures fill the view, surrounded by straggling hedges of prickly-pear, amid which, half-hidden by orchards of fruit-trees, stand the better-built houses of the European residents. Such is a description of many a coast town of the Nearer East. Such is Mersina.

I have said that its importance is due to its being the seaport town through which passes the bulk of the commerce of Cilicia. This is true; but for the reason that there is no other, for its natural disadvantages in this respect are great. Nature, so prodigal of inlets and harbours on the western extremity of Asia Minor, has been severely frugal on the south, and the best accommodation that Mersina can offer is that of an open roadstead, in which ships have perforce to lie at distances of from a mile to two miles from the coast. It cannot compare with the advantages formerly offered by the land-locked harbour of Tarsus, which went so

far to confer upon that city its former greatness; but the Rhegma,—once a lagoon, later an inland lake,—which by the aid of human art was made into an excellent and commodious harbour, is now a marsh, and the Cydnus, which then flowed through it to the sea, now passes by on the east, receiving from it but the overflow of a swamp, which renders useless a large extent of what might under happier circumstances be excellent land. For this reason I have said that the prosperity of Mersina is likely to wane if, as is likely, a branch line is built from the Baghdad railway to some point on the bay of Ayas. It is true that the Pyramus is filling up the latter; but the day when a port there would be rendered useless owing to land-encroachment is too far distant to warrant consideration, whereas the silt brought down by the Cydnus and Saros and deposited in the vicinity of Mersina is distributed along the coast-line by a strong current which sets west, so that, though land-encroachment is greatly retarded, the sea is kept constantly shallow for a considerable distance.

Farther west along the coast may be seen the remains of an artificial harbour at Soli Pompeiopolis, but the facilities offered by nature are no greater here than they are at Mersina. Little seems to be known of the ancient town that stood there. I drove out one morning over a partially possible road, which, however, had been made use of in one part by a cultivator of the soil, who was in the act of ploughing it when I drove by. Being in Turkey, I could hardly credit it that this oversight on the part of the son of toil was due to superabundant zeal, and concluded, therefore, that it was owing to an inability to decide where his field ended and the road began. In addition to the remnants of a harbour, already alluded to, there remain parts of an

THE RUINS OF POMPEIOPOLIS.

aqueduct from the mountains to the north, and not far from the shore a long line of stone pillars, surmounted by well-preserved carved capitals.

The 16½ miles to Tarsus can be covered in fifty minutes by the railway, and I found a hearty welcome awaiting me on arrival from the Rev. Dr Christie, who presides over a college for young men known as St Paul's Institute, which boasts of nearly 200 students, 129 of whom at the time of my visit were boarders. Here I saw Greeks and Armenians being instructed in French and trigonometry, and competing later in the sports which one inevitably associates with an English public school. The present town, which has a large and well-supplied bazaar, has a population of about 25,000. To the archæologist and the historian it presents many problems of the greatest interest—problems still, thanks to the objection raised by Turkish autocracy to the revelation which excavation invariably makes of the perished splendour of a former age, which casts so searching a glare on the decay and squalor of the present. On the eastern side of the town the river Cydnus forms a fine cascade. At one time it undoubtedly flowed through the city, but its course was diverted by Justinian (A.D. 527-563) to prevent a recurrence of a flood which had on a former occasion washed away part of the town.

Situated on the outskirts of the town, among the many gardens of fruit-trees which surround it, stands a massive rectangular construction of hard concrete, or rather a series of blocks separated by open spaces, known as the Dinek Tash or overturned stone, which has for some reason or other succeeded in arrogating to itself a certain measure of distinction as the tomb of Sardanapalus. The futility of any such pretension is sufficiently obvious in light of the fact that, given to

begin with that there was such a person as Sardanapalus and that he was buried in Cilicia, it is to Anchiale that the evidence of the Greek writers would point as the probable resting-place of his remains. Thus Strabo: "Anchiale, a little way above the sea, founded by Sardanapalus, says Aristobulus, who also says there is there a tomb[1] of Sardanapalus, and a stone figure joining the fingers of his right hand as if snapping them, and an inscription in Assyrian writing to the following effect: 'Sardanapalus, son of Anacyndaraxis, built Anchiale and Tarsus in one day. Eat, drink, play, nothing else is worth even that—*i.e.*, a snap of the finger.'" Another inconvenient objection to such a pretension is to be found in the fact that the hard concrete, of which the building is composed, is undoubtedly Roman, while the practical will find a still more cogent reason for disbelief in the almost certain knowledge that no such person as Sardanapalus ever existed. His name, it is true, has been identified with that of Ashurbanipal, one of the greatest of the later Assyrian kings; but the luxurious and effeminate character given him by the Greeks in no way corresponds to what is known of that monarch, and it is fairly safe to assume that Sardanapalus, as such, may be put aside as the creation of a too lively imagination. The most probable conjecture with regard to the Dinek Tash is, that it is the core of a Græco-Roman temple from which the marble and stone facings have been removed.

That it is only necessary to dig anywhere in the present town to find remains of the Tarsus of old of a million inhabitants is a well-known fact, and at every corner large square-cut stones and portions of old stone

[1] The word used is μνημα, which might equally and perhaps more probably mean monument.

pillars, built roughly into the foundations of modern houses, catch the eye. A point of extreme interest is a mound at the edge of the present town, thought to mark the site of the ancient capital, and standing on the summit one would indeed have to be built in a callous mould to be unconscious of the strange spell of the romance of history as it is borne in upon one that here, on this very spot, it in all probability was that Mark Antony "enthroned i' the market-place did sit alone whistling to the air," while "the city cast her people out upon her," to gaze on the syren queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, whose barge "like a burnished throne burn'd on the water," as, decked in a wonderful disguise representing Aphrodite, she sailed up the Cydnus river.

There remains now for me to make a passing reference to Adana, and the chief towns of the Cilicia of to-day may be said to have been enumerated. The morning train from Mersina starts at this time of year at about 8 A.M., and steaming leisurely eastward across the absolute level of the western plain, manages to spend precisely two and a half hours in covering the forty-one miles to the terminus, a performance which no doubt appeals to the inherent sense of dignity which prevades, and is an inalienable attribute of the East. The town is built partly on an isolated hill and partly on the plain, on the right bank of the Saros river, spanned here by an excellent bridge; and, in addition to a good bazaar displaying a vast assortment of the piece-goods of the West, can boast of well-built government buildings, churches, and mosques. I gazed in through the gateway of the most interesting of the last, said to be built on the site of an ancient church, but could see but little of the architectural beauty of the interior, Europeans being prohibited from entering without special permission. Mr Chambers, the hospit-

able chief of the Adana branch of the American mission, who was kind enough to invite me to be his guest during my stay in the town, put the population at about 50,000, — an estimate, however, which he admitted was formed without any accurate data.[1]

Such in brief are the three chief towns of modern Cilicia, a country of enormous agricultural potentiality, which, under good management, could undoubtedly become, to some extent at any rate, a granary of Europe.[2] But it is to be feared that the same methods which have made Turkish government a byword for maladministration and corruption are as prevalent here as they are in any other portion of the Ottoman empire. The result is that the peasants, squeezed beyond endurance to produce a sum of sufficient magnitude to satisfy the central government, after it has been materially reduced at the hands of the different official harpies who have the handling of it on its

[1] The trade of the vilâyet of Adana for the year 1903 amounted to £2,431,844, divided as follows: Imports, £629,450; exports, £1,802,394. Of the imports, goods to the value of £209,907 came from the United Kingdom, India, Egypt, and Cyprus. Of the exports, goods to the value of £269,365 were destined for the United Kingdom and British dependencies. The chief articles of import are: Alcohol, cotton cloth, and manufactured goods, cloth and woollen goods, cotton yarn, hides, iron-ware, indigo, jute sacks and canvas, machinery, silk stuffs, and sugar. Of export: Barley, cotton, flour, gum tragacanth, linseed, oats, sesame seed, timber, wheat, wool, and yellow berries.

It is also satisfactory to observe that whereas the number of steamers flying the British flag at Mersina in 1901 was 88, the number in 1903 amounted to 111 out of a total of 368.

[2] That the country was at one time an exceedingly rich one is certain. See Schlumberger's 'L'epopée byzantine à la fin du x^e^ siècle': "Ce pays de Cilicie, le pachalik actuel d'Adana, pays aujourd'hui désolé, . . . était à l'époque où y pénétra l'armée de Nicéphore, d'une richesse infinie, d'une fertilité incomparable. Les Sarrasins solidement établis dans toutes les anciennes cités Byzantines, y avaient apporté leurs admirables procédés d'agriculture, leur système perfectionné d'irrigation. Toute cette campagne était un vaste jardin, et chaque été les belles moissons Ciliciennes tombaient abondantes sous la faucille des moissonneurs musulmans."

devious way to the capital, give up labouring to produce more than is sufficient to afford them a bare livelihood, since there is little or no chance of their securing any of the profits accruing from a surplus. Nothing is done by the Government in the shape of public works of utility, such as schemes for drainage and irrigation; nor is any encouragement given to those who volunteer to inaugurate the very works which those whose duty it should be to undertake them so sadly neglect.

It is now some years since a group of Europeans interested in the Mersina-Adana railway sought a concession for a scheme of drainage and irrigation. A petition was drawn up in which it was stated that a certain sum of money was to be paid for every acre of land that *could* be irrigated were the concession granted, and the *vali* was approached and asked to co-operate with the promoters in granting facilities for the acquisition of the signatures of the agriculturists of the district. "Oh yes," replied the calculating governor of the province, "but how much am I to receive for my assistance?" The promoters are still biding in patience, and the land is still unirrigated and undrained.[1] The *vali* in asking how large his bribe was to be was doing nothing unusual whatever; indeed he would hardly have been a Turkish governor if he had not done so. A short time before my arrival at Adana the public prosecutor, whose duty necessitated his prosecuting a criminal for murder, oddly enough found himself at that very time the recipient of a handsome gift amounting to £200. The

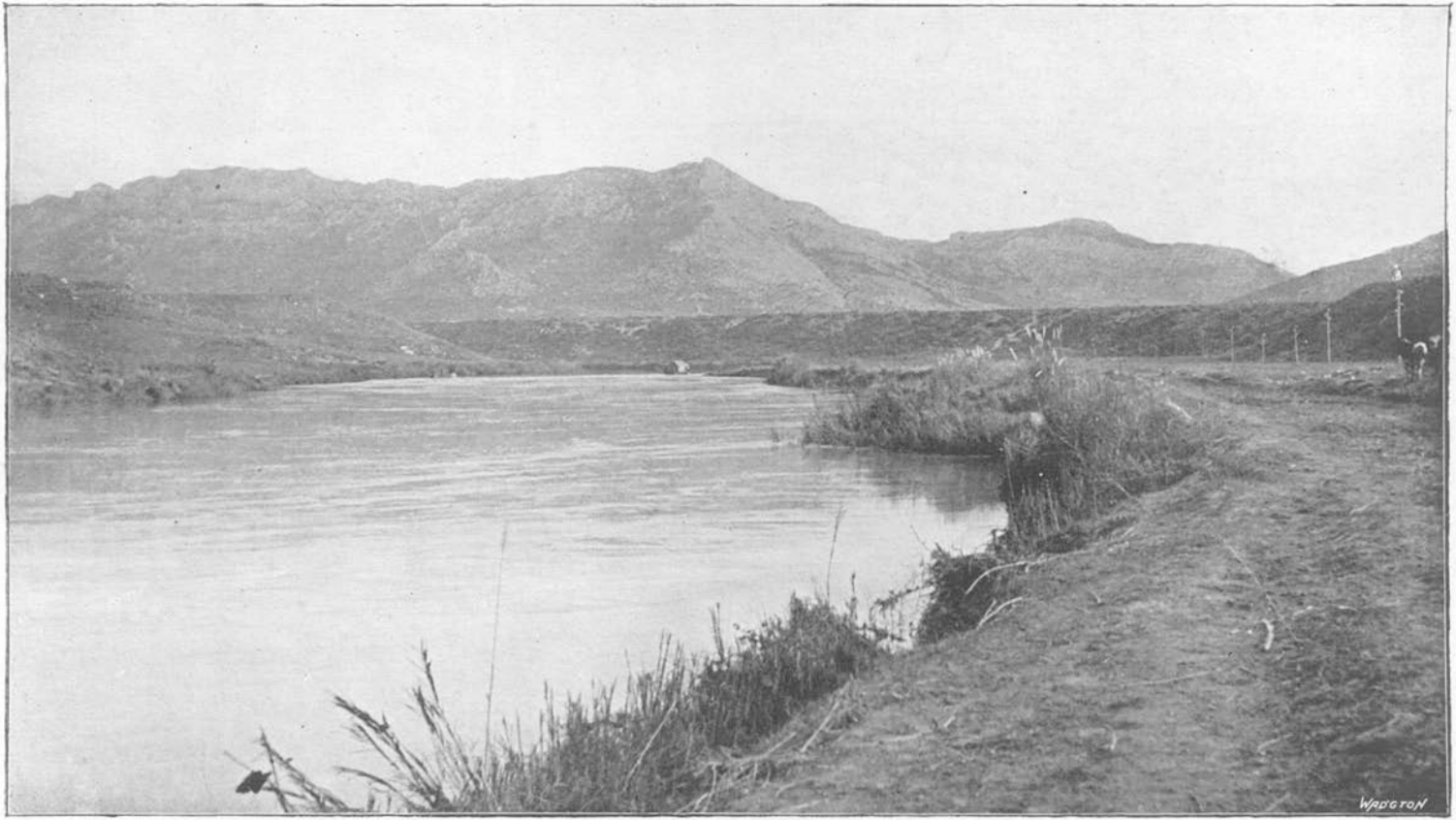
[1] At the time of my visit a group of capitalists, possessed of great influence at Constantinople, were considering the advisability of pressing for a concession. It is possible, therefore, that an improvement may ere long be brought about in the condition of the agriculturists of Cilicia.

prisoner was found not guilty. Curious coincidence, muses the ingenuous stranger; elementary example of cause and effect scoffs the resident, well versed in the tortuous byways of Ottoman jurisprudence!

Under these circumstances it is surprising to find as much commercial and agricultural development as there is. In spite of every disadvantage a certain amount of wheat is grown, and the cotton industry is in a flourishing condition. There are cotton-mills at Adana, Tarsus, and Hamidiyeh. In the hands of Messrs Trypanni the factory at Adana does a large and flourishing business. Founded by the father of the present proprietors, who made a fortune by the export of cotton to America during the war of 1860-1864, the mills now have an average annual output of 1,800,000 lb. of cotton thread, and employ from 600 to 800 hands. The thread finds its way to various parts of the country, where it is made up into cloth, and in a good year the seed extracted from the raw cotton is exported to England to make cotton-seed oil.

The climate of the plain is unpleasant in the summer, when the pests of the insect world issue forth in their thousands from the low-lying marshes in the vicinity of Tarsus, and the European population of Mersina moves in a body to the hills near by. That the heat is appreciable may be gathered from the fact that an enterprising company which was a short time ago formed in Tarsus for making ice, paid no less than 40 per cent the first year, though charging only the modest sum of ½d. per *oka* (2¾ lb.).

Having interviewed the *vali*, Bahri Pasha, a Kurdish prince who exercises a strong if masterful authority over his district, and having obtained a *buyuruldu* or open letter, and the necessary zaptieh, I continued my journey on the morning of January 5. The road runs



THE RIVER JIHUN.

across the rich level plain to Missis, a village on the Jihun river situated at the foot of the Jebel Nur, which I have already described as dividing the two halves of the Cilician plain. A little farther on, on the far side of the river, which is crossed by a good stone bridge, the remains of a building of solid masonry comes into view, one of many such ruins which are to be seen in the eastern half of the Cilician plain, one and all bearing eloquent testimony to the severity of the border warfare of which the country was formerly the scene.

Towards evening on the second day we passed the ruins of a famous stone castle, Toprak Kaleh, on the summit of a low hill; and a few minutes later, a short time before reaching Osmaniyeh, a small village where we intended halting for the night, were treated to one of those magnificent sunsets which are perhaps characteristic rather of the stormy skies of the wild west than of the placid serenity which one associates with the eastern heavens. As we marched steadily east the snow-clad peaks in front of us were suddenly suffused with a glow of pink, while to the west a crimson band shot across the horizon, resting for a moment on the low hills behind us, to cast a lurid light across a heavy bank of scowling storm-clouds immediately above ere it gradually faded from view, leaving the landscape as it went to the neutral tint of night.

The whole of the eastern division of Cilicia presents a more broken surface than does the western, and warrants its description by Schlumberger as "un pays fort accidenté." In places I observed the land being ploughed with primitive implements of wood drawn by oxen; in others large flocks of sheep and herds of goats were to be seen, and sometimes big droves of cattle. A good deal of scrub is observable in parts,

while in others tall reeds and patches of pampas grass give evidence of marshy ground.

Osmaniyeh is the last village we passed in Cilicia, and a short distance beyond the road turns into the Giaour Dagh Mountains. Crossing by the col above Hassan Beyli, we descended to the remarkable valley of the Kara Su, which stretches from Marash in the north to Antioch in the south, passing on our way down it the German excavations at Zingerli, which have laid bare a number of Hittite, Assyrian, and old Semitic monuments. Crossing the valley to the south of Islayeh, we made our way over the southern extremity of the Kurt Dagh to Killis, and thence through vast groves of olives, and later across smiling acres of corn land to Aleppo, which we reached on the eighth day after our start from Adana.

CHAPTER V.

ALEPPO TO DEIR-EL-ZOR.

Aleppo—Its bazaars—Population—Importance as a distributing centre—More tales of Turkish administration—Routes between Aleppo and Mossul—The northern route—The southern route—The proposed railway route—Internal disorder—Reason for travelling by southern route—Start from Aleppo—Nature of country—A long march and a scanty dinner—Meskineh—The lands of the Euphrates—Historical interest of the river banks—Deir—A visit from a Turkish colonel—I secure an escort—Road-making—The disadvantages of an absence of road.

ALEPPO, more generally known in the country as Haleb, is a large town, possessed in one quarter of many well-built—for Turkey almost imposing—houses. The chief feature, however, which attracts attention is the castle or citadel, consisting of a steep artificial mound crowned by a wall, which encloses the various buildings on the summit, the whole considered by the inhabitants to be impregnable. Both the walls and buildings, however, are in bad preservation, and the best preserved and far most massive portions now extant are the solidly built fortification, which gives entrance to certain subterranean chambers, by means of which access is obtained to the summit, and the stone bridge across the moat which surrounds the whole mound. The bazaars are worthy of note, consisting of a labyrinth of covered-in arcades which run from one into another, and cover a

very large extent of ground. The description of them given by Dr Russell upwards of a century ago, in his 'Natural History of Aleppo,' holds good to-day: "The bazaars or markets are lofty stone edifices in the form of a long gallery, for the most part very narrow, arched above, or else roofed with wood. The shops, which are either placed in recesses of the wall or formed of wooden sheds projecting from it, are ranged upon each side upon a stone platform two or three feet high, which runs the whole length of the gallery. In many of the old bazaars these shops are so confined as barely to leave room for the shopkeeper to display his wares and for himself and one guest to sit conveniently. The buyers are obliged to remain standing on the outside; and when opposite shops happen to be in full employment it is not easy for a passenger to make his way through the crowd."

The town has a population of 135,000, including a Russian Consul-General, a Russian Vice-Consul, and one Russian subject! and its chief importance lies in its being a large trade depot and distributing centre for the surrounding vilâyets. It is probable, therefore, that the advent of the railway will tend to lessen rather than to increase its importance. From the south it will eventually be connected with Damascus when the French line *viâ* Homs and Hamah, which has reached the latter place, is completed. On the north a branch line will leave the German main line at Tel Habesch, a little east of Killis, and cover the 60 kilometres between that place and Aleppo. It has also some importance as a military centre, and in addition to the many well-built stone houses belonging to private individuals in the Azizieh quarter — built of the excellent stone which is found close by — there are large barracks where a regiment of cavalry, a bat-

tery of artillery, and two regiments of infantry are quartered.

Tales of Turkish order and justice are, of course, as plentiful here as they are in any other part of Turkey. A company of soldiers had in one town not so very far off stormed and captured the telegraph-office, and having put themselves into communication with the capital, declared their intention of monopolising the wires until some portion at least of their arrears of pay had been made good. In another direction I heard at first hand of a case of a man who had been dead for upwards of ten years having to pay the military exemption tax! But perhaps the most comic example of Turkish administration which came under my notice was a little *contretemps* in connection with the mail-bags. Some apprehension was being felt lest the plague, which was prevalent at Damascus, should spread to Aleppo. Strict quarantine regulations were consequently enforced against that city, among others a decree going forth that all mail-bags were to be fumigated. Fumigation was carried on with great zest, and it was probably with far greater disgust than surprise that the European community, while patiently awaiting the delivery of their letters, learnt that the fumigation had gone further than was intended, and that the whole of their mail had been consumed!

From Aleppo to Mossul the traveller has a choice of routes. Perhaps the best known and least exposed to Arab raids is the road by Diarbekr and Mardin, which is said to be much patronised by caravans for the latter reason. This is the northern route. Another route, making a detour to the south, but shorter than that by Diarbekr, runs straight to the Euphrates at Meskineh, whence it follows the right bank of the river to Deir-el-Zor. Crossing the river here by ferry, the track

continues up the right bank of the Khabur river, which is crossed at Shehdadi, and then traverses the desert steppe of Central Mesopotamia to the Sinjar Mountains and Mossul. It is, however, by neither of these routes that it is proposed to construct the Baghdad railway. Running almost due east from Killis, it will pass through Harran and Ras-el-Ain, and leaving Mardin to the north reach Mossul by Nissibin. It had been my intention to travel by this latter route, but circumstances decided otherwise. For rumour had been busy of late, which by the beginning of the New Year left little room for doubt, that the whole of the country in the vicinity of Ras-el-Ain, as far south as the Jebel Abdul Azziz, was in a state of seething irritation. It was said that Ras-el-Ain itself had become the centre of a vast encampment of upwards of 15,000 tents, and that there the arch-brigand Ibrahim Pasha, with a swarm of *Hamidiyeh* myrmidons and an allied force of Anazeh Arabs, was waiting in readiness for the expected onslaught of a horde of Shammar Arabs, they in their turn accompanied by their Kurd allies.

During the previous year the Shammar tribe had suffered heavily at the hands of the notorious Ibrahim, and, acting on the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, were now rallying their forces, bent on retaliation in the form of battle, murder, and sudden death. Had the prospect been merely that of an inter-tribal fight among the Arabs, it is possible that a traveller might have passed through with impunity; but from all accounts it mattered little to the *Hamidiyeh* Kurds, who under pretence of serving the empire bear their royal title, and receive arms and ammunition from the Government, who fell into their net, all alike being considered equal and legitimate prey.

I was not altogether surprised, therefore, when on

approaching Ali Pasha, the general at the head of the "extraordinary command" in Aleppo, and asking for an escort and permission to proceed, I was met with a polite but firm refusal. Permission, then, to travel by this route not being forthcoming, there remained the northern route by Diarbekr and the southern one by Deir and the Sinjar Mountains. Under certain conditions in the dim future, a branch line is to be constructed from some point on the Baghdad line to Diarbekr, and it was even rumoured in Constantinople that the main line itself might after all pass that way; but despite these facts I decided to travel by the southern route, since the more northern was already well known to me from the descriptions given of it by others, and the country traversed by the southern is all part of the same plain, and presents the same particulars as the tract between the Euphrates and the Tigris *viâ* Harran and Ras-el-Ain, through which the railway is to be constructed.

Accordingly, after a short rest in Aleppo, I set out on the morning of the 15th January in a direction slightly south of east. From Aleppo to the Euphrates at Meskineh the track lies over vast stretches of undulating ground, practically treeless (except in the immediate vicinity of the town itself, where groves of olives and pistachio-trees are seen), though large tracts of it are under cultivation. Once through the groves which surround the town, there is nothing to relieve the monotony of the dreary reaches of an almost featureless expanse beyond occasional small villages, resembling bunched-up conglomerations of giant clay beehives, and a number of artificial mounds which are scattered over the country, or the saline waters of the salt Lake Jebûl, which may be seen to the south shimmering in the sun.

At Deir Hafr, an Arab village, it is usual to spend the first night out of Aleppo. The march is a long one, so that with irritating perversity my muleteer seized the opportunity of making an unusually late start, with the result that night was upon us long before we had reached our destination. There being no moon till late, we were obliged to grope our way at snail's pace over the plain, with nothing whatsoever to guide us but a camel-track, which under the circumstances was hardly distinguishable. The ponies with the baggage did not arrive till 11 P.M., after I had dined off barley bread and a delectable compound of sugar and grapes, the only food the Arabs could produce.

As one approaches the Euphrates one passes over a good deal of uncultivated plain covered with short grass, on which small flocks of sheep are to be seen grazing, and on reaching the river, comes upon the three mud buildings which constitute Meskineh. Had the scheme of navigating the Euphrates from Baghdad to the latitude of Aleppo proved practicable, Meskineh, which now affords the shelter of a moderate *khan*, might have become an important place as the head-quarters of the steam navigation. At the present day, however, the river is only navigated by small native craft, and the prospects of Meskineh rising superior to its present unpretentious level are remote.[1]

From here on, the road lies sometimes in the river-plain, sometimes over the great rolling stretches of

[1] In 'The Nearer East' Mr Hogarth says, "The river is not considered navigable above Rakka, while it is not in point of fact ascended above Hit." I could not learn that any steam-vessel had ascended the river even as far as Hit for at least a decade, while if the above is intended to refer to other vessels, it is equally incorrect, since shallow native craft carry goods from Birejik to Deir, where they are transhipped into larger boats, and conveyed down the river.

undulating steppe land which, for want of a better term, is usually designated desert. In point of fact, the country through which the Euphrates rolls its broad placid waters at this period of its journey to the sea is a vast broken waste, showing here and there rocky and stony excrescences, covered for the greater part with short grass and aromatic scrub, capable of affording subsistence, during some part of the year at least, for flocks of sheep and herds of goats, but too stony, and possessed of too precarious a water-supply, to be considered arable. Yet,—I am speaking of winter, when I passed through,—despite the covering of herbage which gives the ground immediately around one a colouring of green, the general view presented by the landscape is a dreary brown, such colouring as I have described becoming merged at a short distance in an all-pervading neutral tint, produced by a combination of the earth itself and the faded grey of the ubiquitous desert scrub, wan and sad looking in the lifeless garb of winter. Along the river-banks themselves thick jungle of liquorice, Euphrates poplar, tall, lank thorn-bush, and kindred growth is always to be found, while some little colour is here and there infused into the scene by pale-green patches of tamarisk, and odd little pieces of riparian cultivation. Humanity is represented by the squat black tents of the Anazeh Arabs, with their flocks of sheep and herds of goats and camels. Such existed in no great quantity at this season, though I was informed that in the summer months the whole river-plain between Meskineh and Abu Hurareh, a ruined fort a day's journey farther east, is alive with Arabs, who collect to pay their annual dues to the Government.

Between Meskineh and Deir, a six days' journey, no places of importance are passed, small mud police-

stations at intervals of from twenty to thirty miles being the only form of permanent habitation, if I except the few small houses which have grown up round the largest of them—Sabkah. The places of greatest historical interest are Phunsah and Rakka, the latter on the left bank close to the junction of the Belik and the Euphrates. At the former place the river was forded by the army of Cyrus the younger, by Darius, both before and after Issus, and by Alexander in pursuit, while Thapsacus, which stood on or near the present site, has been identified with Tiphsah, the eastern boundary of King Solomon's dominion. The latter, the site of Nicephorium, is still a fair-sized place, and extensive ruins are visible around it.

On January 22 I reached Deir, which is described as "a considerable place in the desert." I found it a small town with two fair *khans*, some fairly good houses, and a long central street and bazaar. An officer of rank and 500 men are quartered here, in addition to the usual police, and on arrival I left a letter of introduction on him, given me by Ali Pasha at Aleppo. Result: in the midst of general untidiness consequent on the rearrangement of baggage in the bare room of the *khan*, enter a smart uniformed individual, evidently of high rank, to the discomfiture of the Englishman in shirt-sleeves, knickerbockers, and shooting-boots! The Colonel, however,—for it was no other,—was affability itself, assured me that there was no occasion for formality, and intimated that he had merely come to inform me that, as I intended crossing the desert to Mossul, an escort would be necessary, and that, in compliance with the wish of his superior at Aleppo, he would supply me with the men the following morning. "How many men did he consider

necessary?" "He could not allow me to proceed with less than six, and would arrange for a larger number if I desired it." I groaned inwardly, desired my interpreter to offer him my profuse thanks for his kindness, and to beg him not to trouble himself by making arrangements for sending more than the necessary minimum. "He was at my service, and it should be as I wished," and for the next half-hour we passed those little absurdities—the Colonel seated on my only chair, myself on the bed—which under such circumstances have perforce to do duty for conversation.

In the vicinity of the town I found considerable care being bestowed upon the construction of a metalled road, which extended for three or four miles in the direction of Aleppo. This I learnt was the work of a syndicate of merchants, whose too sanguine subscribers entertained the hope that it might some day be laid with rails. Should it be successful in escaping the usual fate of premature collapse, which overtakes most schemes of regeneration in Turkey, it will no doubt be of some service to wheeled traffic, especially if an experience which I witnessed not far from Deir is of common occurrence. Rounding a small spur of cliffs which bound the river-plain, I was startled by vociferous shouting and a resounding crash, and the next moment came in sight of an *araba* lying upside down in front of me. It required the united efforts of the spilt party, and of all the king's horses, and all the king's men, in the shape of my escort, who arrived upon the scene most opportunely, to set it up again.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DESERT.

Crossing the Euphrates—The monotonous desolation of the country—A surprise—A band of Arab marauders—A peaceful conclusion—Arab propensities—The river Gozan of the Old Testament—Crossing the Khabur river—The Mesopotamian steppe—A well in the desert—Reach the Jebel Sinjar—The Yezidis—A punitive expedition—An uncomfortable night—The country between Jebel Sinjar and the Tigris—The aspect of Mesopotamia in spring and in summer—Description by Sir Henry Layard.

FROM Deir the direct road to Baghdad continues down the right bank of the Euphrates by Hit, but to go to Mossul the river must now be crossed and a north-easterly direction taken across the desert plains of Mesopotamia. After crossing on the morning of the 24th, a lengthy proceeding effected by means of a cumbrous ferry propelled by a vociferous gang of pre-historic looking Arabs armed with a motley collection of oars and punt-poles, we travelled over a country devoid even of the attraction hitherto afforded by the narrow ribbon of the jungle-covered banks of the Euphrates. It is a country in which one may ride on and on for hours at a time without so much as seeing a human being or any sign of human habitation, such life as there is, in the shape of Arab encampments, clinging closely to the banks of the Khabur river, which flows sluggishly south to mingle its waters with those

of the Euphrates a little south of Deir. It is in fact often only by a thin black line of Arab tents stretching across the plain that it is possible to follow the course of the stream, which otherwise becomes indistinguishable at a very short distance. Where these wanderers pitch their tents little plots of land will be ploughed and clumsily irrigated, but away from the river-banks nothing will meet the eye but waste—dreary, desolate waste.

Often it is across an absolute level that one canters, hoping against hope that some time that elusive horizon in front will be reached; again it is across great billowy undulations that go rolling away into infinite space, tempting one always to think that at any rate from the crest of the next something definite will await one's gaze. But the summit of the next is reached, and of the one after that, and there is always just such another beyond, unrelieved by anything but the meagre grass and rusty scrub which, while redeeming it from the utter destitution of the true desert, serves but to accentuate the hideous forlornness of the whole surrounding. And so one relapses into indifference and jogs wearily along, one's thoughts wandering absently to other lands, since there is nothing in the present to keep them, thankful when night, or some small isolated police-station, or the squat black tents of some Arab encampment, apprise one that the end of the day's march is at hand.

"Ah!" The short sharp exclamation broke the deep silence which Nature always preserves in those vast solitudes of hers where space is infinite and time and distance have no place. My wandering thoughts came tumbling back, from a wild flight to distant lands, to the reality of the present. Mohammed had pulled up, and was standing like a statue gazing into vacancy. "What is it?" I inquired, as I pulled up alongside

of him. He turned slowly in the saddle and then pointed towards the horizon in front of him. I stared hard, but saw nothing but stones and sand and faded vegetation, and in the distance a small column of dust —a sand-devil, I thought; they were common enough. "I see nothing," I said, as I pulled out my field-glasses and swept the horizon. Wait a moment though. Yes, through the field-glasses the little cloud of dust did look different from the usual sand-devil, which whirled giddily round like some demented sprite and then vanished, unstable creation born and destroyed of the wind. There was something more solid about this, and, moreover, the cloud which but a moment before had been but the size of a man's hand was rapidly assuming alarming proportions.

Mohammed looked anxiously back. The pack-ponies with the remainder of the escort were crawling leisurely along some distance behind, as is the manner of pack-ponies and muleteers when left to themselves. He signalled to them to hurry on, and then fixed his gaze in front of him once more. "We must wait here till they close up," he said. Dark objects began to show amid the approaching dust-cloud—numbers of them. The truth dawned upon me like a flash, and the revelation was not an altogether pleasant one. I had not the slightest doubt now what it was that was coming racing towards us behind that thin veil of sand, but I asked all the same. "Yes," came the reply, "Arabs, and all mounted." I glanced over my shoulder and noticed that the rest of our party were now close upon us, and then turned my eyes upon the object in front of us once more. I admit that my feelings were not those of absolute composure. When you see a body of forty or fifty mounted men, all armed with long spears, which they brandish menacingly over their heads, galloping

furiously towards you, and are unaware of their exact intentions, you have some excuse for perturbation; and that is what I saw now. Yet admiration struggled for a little foothold too, for it was a grand sight. The swarthy Arabs galloping recklessly over the desert plain, their long white robes streaming in the wind, and their whirling lances flashing in the sun, made a picture such as one does not often see. They were so eminently fitted to their surroundings—wild children of the desert, free as the winds, born to be lords of the land.

But there was little enough time for musing, for the Arabs were now within rifle-shot, and seeing the rest of our party close up they halted too, and one of them rode forward in our direction a little ahead of his followers. It seemed that a parley was desired, and Mohammed rode slowly out to meet him, while we stayed still where we were. I fingered my revolver mechanically, and found myself listening for the beats of the pendulum of time, so slowly did the seconds pass. At last they met midway, and a period of strained excitement ensued. How long they talked I cannot say, probably not more than a few seconds, but it seemed long enough, and when at last they parted and a signal from Mohammed warned us to come on, the cry of the muleteers urging their charges on once more broke pleasantly across the desert air and relieved the nervous strain which had hung over all. As we rode slowly forward the opposing band divided to right and left while we passed through between them, and the last that I saw of them as they galloped away into space was a wild chase, which had all the appearance of a glorified pig-stick, in which one of the band selected for the purpose was the pig, pursued at break-neck speed by a delirious and shrieking band of his fellows across the plain.

It is not always that a caravan will pass by such a company with impunity, though an affray with government soldiers armed with modern rifles is not altogether to the taste of such roving bands of free-booters, unless, as is sometimes the case, they are equally well armed themselves. Wandering over such a country as is theirs, it is perhaps only to be expected that an independent and freedom-loving people such as they should treat the moral authority of the Porte with scant respect, and I thought more kindly of my friend the Colonel at Deir for his insisting on my being in a position to back mere moral persuasion with a show of force.

The district which one traverses in a northern direction on the right bank of the Khabur river is the Gozan of the Old Testament, to which Shalmaneezer carried the captive Israelites in the reign of Hoshea, "and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan."[1] It was once prosperous and well wooded, but now a few mounds and scattered remnants of former buildings are all that remain of its erstwhile prosperity.

About sixty miles up the river is situated a small isolated police-station, Shehdadi, where the Khabur is crossed by means of a ferry similar to that at Deir, and the traveller strikes east into the heart of the Mesopotamian steppe. A long stretch it seems across the dreary, almost waterless desert, before the small settlements which cling to the foot of the Sinjar mountains are reached. My ponies were weak with long marching and short rations, and after plodding steadily along from sunrise on the 27th, we pitched

[1] 2 Kings xvii. 6. Halah has been identified with Sar-i-pul i Zohab, the second stage on the Baghdad-Kermanshah route after crossing the Persian frontier. *Vide* Mrs Bishop's 'Travels in Persia and Kurdistan,' vol. i.

A WELL IN THE DESERT.

camp in the middle of the plain shortly after sunset. A small pool two parts mud and two parts brackish water which we passed during the day, and at which we replenished our water-skins, formed the centre of a large Arab encampment, whose flocks of sheep and herds of camels were to be seen straying over the plain in all directions; but these once passed, all signs of life vanished once more, and the great silence of solitude brooded over the land. Once or twice, it is true, small groups of horsemen, easily distinguishable in the distance by their long lances, would appear suddenly on the summit of some mound, but after taking stock of our party they would as suddenly melt away again, lost to view in the limitless expanse.

At length on the evening of a cold clear day—for the winds in the winter are bitter and the thermometer is apt to sink low—we reached the first villages at the foot of the Jebel Sinjar, a limestone range which, with the Jebel Abdul Azziz, forms the only feature in Mesopotamia which can be termed mountain. All along the footline of the hills small villages, partly Mohammedan and partly Yezidi,[1] are to be found, whose inhabitants cultivate the land.

[1] The Yezidis are a people living for the most part scattered over the country between Erivan and Jebel Sinjar. Their origin is unknown, and their religion is described as a mixture of the old Babylonian religion, Zoroastrianism, Manichæism, and Christianity, and as having also an affinity with that of the Ansariyeh. They were at one time much persecuted by the Turks, and owe much of their present freedom to the good offices of Sir Henry Layard, who in 1848 presented delegates from them to Sir Stratford Canning, the British ambassador at Constantinople. "Through his [Sir Stratford Canning's] kindly intercession a firman or imperial order was granted to the Yezidis, which freed them from all illegal impositions, forbade the sale of their children as slaves, secured to them the full enjoyment of their religion, and placed them on the same footing as other sects of the empire. It was further promised that arrangements should be made to release them from such military regulations as rendered their service in the army incompatible with the strict observance

By the greatest bad luck a flying column of Turkish soldiers, returning to Mossul from a punitive expedition against the Shammar Arabs,—they had had an encounter in the desert a few days before, leaving, according to their own account, thirty Arabs dead upon the field, while they had despatched eight of their own men severely wounded to be looked after at Deir,—had elected to pass the night at the very village which I reached tired and hungry some two hours after sunset, with the result that every house was full of men and mules. My baggage was far behind, and I was unwillingly constrained to make the best of things in a mud shanty along with half a dozen Turkish soldiers and an odd villager or two, who had apparently been ousted from their own houses and overflowed into ours, as providing the only available space. This about filled up the room, and all were settling down *comfortably* for the night when the owners, who not altogether unnaturally seemed to think that they had some claim at least to standing-room in their own house, appeared upon the scene. The difficulty, however, was happily solved by the ejection of the family donkey, who, with stolid indifference to the unwonted company, was munching straw in a corner of the apartment. It was certainly a night to cause one to ponder somewhat regretfully upon the discarded comforts of civilisation, more especially when, to crown all, the occupants insisted on lighting a smoky wood-fire in the middle of the floor—there was no fireplace or chimney—and closing the only aperture, the door!

of their religious duties."—'Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon,' by A. H. Layard. They seem to have many strange superstitions, and, according to Dr Wolff, if a circle be drawn round them "they would rather die within it than attempt to escape out of it unless a portion of the circle be effaced."—'Bokhara,' by the Rev. Joseph Wolff, D.D., LL.D.

The country from the foot of the Sinjar Mountains to Mossul is slightly hilly, while an occasional village and patch of cultivation are to be met with; but the general appearance is sufficiently depressing, and it comes as an intense relief when, from the summit of some slight eminence, the snow-clad wall of the Tiari heights to the east of the Tigris becomes visible, an effectual boundary to the seemingly interminable steppe.

From the description given in the foregoing pages it will be gathered that the scene presented by the Mesopotamian desert is anything but exhilarating; but, lest a wrong impression be gained, it must be added that at the time I saw the country it was neither at its best—nor quite at its worst. In spring much of the country teems with flowers and herbage, and presents an appearance of brilliant verdure resembling rather the broad stretches of an English down than the arid reaches of an Asian desert. Such viridity, however, is short-lived, and with the first feverish breath of summer all vegetation withers, as, under the fierce glare of an Eastern sun, the land becomes scorched and burnt, and where for a few short weeks a veritable garden flourished, nothing remains but a parched and dessicated waste, presenting all the savage horror of lifeless and dust-strewn desolation. Few Englishmen have known the country as did Sir Henry Layard, who has left us a vivid description of the rapid change from spring to summer: "The change to summer had been as rapid as that which ushered in the spring. The verdure of the plain had perished almost in a day. Hot winds coming from the desert had burnt up and carried away the shrubs; flights of locusts, darkening the air, had destroyed the few patches of cultivation, and had completed the havoc commenced by the heat of the sun."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LANDS OF THE TIGRIS.

Curiosity concerning the past—Collections of ancient records—Time the destroyer—Koyunjik and Nebi Yunus—Nimrud—The Germans at Babylon—Mossul—Down the Tigris on a raft—A useful escort!—Samara and its objects of pilgrimage—The Malwiyeh—Latent wealth of the lands of the Tigris—Sir William Willcock's scheme—British Government must interest themselves—Chaldæa described by Herodotus—Reach Baghdad—The romance of Baghdad is of the past—A *guffa*—Described by Herodotus—Baghdad a commercial centre—Shortcomings of the Turkish Government—Fate of a public benefactor—Trade of Baghdad—Lack of transport—Extraordinary rates of freight—Great Britain must control the country from Baghdad to the Persian Gulf.

THERE is deep down in the soul of man an intense curiosity concerning the past. He reads history and revels in the deeds of men and nations that are gone. But this is not enough. To the student of antiquity history as we know it is the story of modern times. Before the dawn of history, what then? Who were they who dwelt in the earth in those remote times still hidden beneath the veil of oblivion, or appearing but dimly through the hazy light of confused tradition? Whence came they, of what stock, who was there before them? and if we probe the question to the bottom, what was the origin of man? After the question "Why am I here?" there is probably none that

exceeds in interest that of "Who was here before me?" and there can be few who have not been assailed at some time or other with a burning desire to "wind the mighty secrets of the past and turn the key of Time."

It is fortunate, therefore, that there is another trait common to mankind of all ages—namely, an unconquerable aversion to being forgotten. Hence all these libraries of history, hence, too, the vast collections of ancient records and inscriptions, which are daily being added to from the buried cities of the East, all telling strange stories of kings and nations long since dead. There is many a monarch who reigned in the narrow strip of territory between the two great rivers of the Near East, who might well exclaim with the poet, "Exegi monumentum ære perennius."

I do not think that any expert knowledge of Assyriology is necessary to arouse one's enthusiasm. I lay no claim to anything more than the most superficial acquaintance with the leaves of the great book of the past, and when those learned in such matters talk animatedly to me of the achievements of the great Sharrukin, 3800 years before our era,[1] or of that beneficent lawgiver King Khamurabi and his code, I endeavour to look wise and at the same time preserve a discreet silence. Nevertheless in the presence of the

[1] I believe that the oldest authenticated date is still that of Sharrukin (Sargon), King of Agadê, which was determined by the discovery of a cylinder of Nabonidus, the last King of Babylon (550 B.C.), whereon he has described the finding of the foundation cylinder of Naram-Sin, son of Sharrukin, in the great sun-temple at Sippar, "which for thrice thousand and twice hundred years none of the kings that lived before me had seen." This gives 3750 B.C. as the date of Naram-Sin (3200+550), and roughly 3800 as the date of his father Sharrukin. I am aware, however, that Assyriologists at the present time—Professor Hilprecht, for instance—are confident of the tremendously ancient dates of from 7000 to 8000 B.C., though I know of no discovery which affords definite proof of such a date.

hoar ruins of the past I fall an easy victim to the spell of antiquity. For we have a strange reverence for all that is old. As I finger some tablet or cylinder of clay scored with the curious dashes of the cuneiform alphabet telling a tale of the past, and realise that I am handling the actual handiwork of some monarch who reigned five thousand years ago, which has lain silent in the earth while nations have come and gone, to hand his fame through the ages to a wondering posterity, I am conscious of an extreme fascination. And now as I wandered among the mounds of Nineveh and Babylon, and trod in the courts of Esarhaddon and Nebuchadnezzar, I dreamed dreams of the glory of their day, reconstructed the palaces and temples of their monarchs and their gods, and pictured dimly to myself "how the world looked when it was fresh and young, and the great deluge still had left it green." And when I returned to earth again and gazed on the great piles of *débris* where stood great cities, the pathos of decay swept over me, and I bowed before the inexorable power of the destroyer Time. For here, as elsewhere, Time sadly overcometh all things, and amid such surroundings the poetic lines of Sir Thomas Brown held a strange charm for me :—

> Time sadly overcometh all things, and is now dominant and sitteth on a sphinx and looketh into Memphis and old Thebes, while his sister Oblivion reclineth semi-somnous on a pyramid gloriously triumphing, making puzzles of Titanian erections, and turning old glories into dreams. History sinketh beneath her cloud. The traveller as he paceth through those deserts asketh of her who builded them? And she mumbleth something, but what it is he heareth not.

But to leave generalities and descend to particulars, the great mounds of Koyunjik and Nebi Yunus, which rise within the colossal earthern ramparts that mark

EXCAVATIONS AT BABYLON.

the walls of Nineveh, described by Xenophon as being upwards of 100 feet in height in his day, and still standing to a height of from 40 to 50 feet, guard well the treasures which they conceal.[1] At the mound of Nimrud farther south, marking the site of a town founded by Shalmanezer in the year 1300 B.C., which reached the zenith of its greatness as the capital of King Asshurnazirpal in the ninth century B.C., there is far more to be seen than there is at Koyunjik. Here the tunnels dug by Sir H. Layard are still open, and the outside casing of huge square blocks of stone of the observatory tower are still visible and in excellent preservation.[2] A vast store of monuments of the greatest interest have been removed from here, conspicuous among them the famous black obelisk and a statue of Nebo, which now repose in the British Museum; but even so, many carved stones are still lying where they were found, including the large figure of a man, the lower half still buried in the earth, and some beautiful specimens of the great winged bulls common at the entrance to the courts of Assyrian palaces.

At Babylon, where German scientists had already been at work for four years, having built themselves, with German thoroughness, a house on the spot, still more is to be seen. The excavations, carried on systematically and thoroughly, have already laid bare the pavemented streets and the solid walls of the palaces and temples of the city described by Herodotus. In one part there is an excellent specimen of a keystone

[1] We may hope, however, to hear of further discoveries at Koyunjik, since Mr L. W. King arrived there in the spring of 1903 to carry on excavations on behalf of the British Museum.

[2] This is one of the two *ziggurats* which have been found to have their sides and not their corners facing the four cardinal points. The other is the temple of Bel in Babylon.

arch,—a crushing blow to the theory that the latter was a Roman invention; and in another a wall ornamented with figures in bas-relief had recently been discovered.

The present counterpart of ancient Nineveh is Mossul, which, as may already have suggested itself, has given its name to one of those fabrics which have found such favour with the ladies of the West: the connection is obvious—Mossul-lin, muslin. It stands on the right bank of the river, just opposite the site of the ancient city, and of course it is surrounded by walls—no town would have remained a town for five minutes without them, encompassed by freebooting Arabs. Seven gates give access to the town, or nine if you include two which I think give on to the river. Of course its interest cannot compare with that aroused by the stupendous piles of *débris* opposite, nevertheless it is possessed of a distinct charm of its own. For it is a town which first and foremost can only be described as of the East—Eastern. Absolutely untouched by Western influence, it remains what it has been ever since it came into being, affected little more by slight contact with the Turk in the shape of barracks, and the governor of the province, of which it is the capital, than it is by the utter absence of European ideas. The bazaar is a scene of animated life, but the majority of the streets, when not mere tunnels through the buildings, as is often the case, form a complex maze of narrow alleys, so narrow in many instances as to make it difficult for two persons to walk abreast conveniently, and enclosed by blind walls of such height that the sky is often only to be seen by craning one's neck upwards. Filth indescribable and unutterable is, needless to say, the predominant feature of the town, whose sanitary arrangements cannot even be described as primitive,

THE TOMB OF JONAH (NEBI YUNUS) ON THE MOUND OF THE SAME NAME.

because there are none. I spent three days in the discomfort of a *khan* which has doubtless been accumulating dirt for some centuries, one of the "two scurvy inns" in all probability described by Tavernier in the seventeenth century as the only hostelries of the place, and then, having had a raft of skins constructed, embarked on a journey down the Tigris.

Floating down the Tigris on a raft is a restful and leisurely mode of progress, more especially when the wind happens to blow up-stream, in which case the word progress altogether ceases to be applicable to the situation, and makes a pleasant change from hard marching through a desert country. I had huts of felt stretched over a wooden frame erected on the raft for myself and Joseph, and before leaving took the precaution of securing the services of a soldier to act as escort and walking passport. With really supreme sagacity the authorities at Mossul, knowing that I was about to proceed through a country inhabited entirely by Arabs, selected for this duty a man who could only talk Kurdish! As an ornament, his value was a negligible quantity; as an article of practical utility, absolutely nil. On one occasion, while waiting close to a village on the river-bank, I suggested that he should clear off the Arabs who were crowding round and becoming a nuisance by reason of their too great inquisitiveness, to which he replied with every symptom of regret that he had no orders from his Government to shoot down the riparian population! After this I ceased wasting time and energy in trying to knock sense through his abnormally thick skull, and made the best of a bad job by treating him as a huge joke.

On the evening of the first day we glided over the great dam which stretches across the river twenty

miles below Mossul, and later on passed the mound of Nimrud already referred to, the village of Kaleh Shergat close to the ruins of the ancient city of Asshur, which gave its name to the great Assyrian empire, and the hamlet of Tekrit, where I changed raftsmen, tying up on the evening of the fifth day close to the sacred city of Samara, whose brazen dome shone like molten gold in the rays of the setting sun.

The town of Samara, situated on the left bank of the Tigris, not a mile and a half from the river, as stated in Murray's handbook (I made it just 550 paces from my raft to the city gate), is the usual collection of erections of sun-dried brick, surrounded by walls built by the richer pilgrims to resist the incursions of pillaging Bedouins. The objects of pilgrimage are the tomb of Imam Hussein Askar, above which rises the great golden dome which catches the eye from afar, and a small mosque and dome, beautifully embellished with enamelled tile-work, which mark the site of the disappearance of the Imam Mohammed el Mahdi, who, according to Moslem belief, will return to earth again with Christ at the end of the world.

The only other object which stands out in relief against the dead level of the plain is a curious spiral tower built of brick, which rises to a height of 163 feet at one end of a ruined *madressah*, and is known as the Malwiyeh. The spiral way which leads to the summit is now devoid of any rail, and presents a surface, from 2 to 4 feet in width, of brick roughly imbedded in cement. The portion giving access to the small turret which forms the apex has been much broken, and at the present time affords but a narrow ledge, which would constitute a formidable obstacle to any one with "nerves" or a bad head for heights. The top of the turret itself is reached by a short flight of steps, and

affords a fine view of the surrounding country. The whole length of the spiral way is something like 300 yards—that is to say, I counted rather over 300 somewhat uneven paces from the top to the bottom.

The interest of the country south of Samara lies in its extraordinary agricultural potentialities. South of a line drawn from Hit on the Euphrates to Samara on the Tigris is a vast extent of magnificent alluvial soil, requiring only water to restore to it its pristine harvests. There are in Upper Chaldæa, according to Sir William Willcocks,—the famous originator of the great Assouan dam on the Nile,—no less than 1,280,000 acres "of first-class land, waiting only for water to yield at once a handsome return." Here, then, is an opening for British enterprise and capital. Here is an opportunity for Great Britain to encourage British capital to develop the resources of Mesopotamia, "as strengthening her political claim to consideration and excluding that of possible antagonists,"[1] and to create vested interests which will refuse to be ignored when the day of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire is at hand. Sir William Willcocks gives an idea of the probable cost of a scheme of irrigation and of its results. £8,000,000, he says, should suffice for the irrigation of the 1,280,000 acres of Upper Chaldæa—£7, that is, per acre. He values the land roughly at £38,000,000, and, placing the rent at about £3 per acre, shows a return of £3,840,000. Allowing nearly half of this sum for the up-keep of canals, there is still a net return of £2,000,000, or 25 per cent on £8,000,000 of capital.

It may be urged that £8,000,000 is a large sum to sink in such a country as Asiatic Turkey, and that those who hesitated to risk £5,000,000 in a similar undertaking in Egypt under an excellent administra-

[1] Captain A. T. Mahan.

tion, and who were sceptical of the estimated profits of such a venture, may well fight shy of investing capital in Turkey, a country notorious chiefly for its sublime contempt for anything which savours of order or justice. But in Egypt the dam is there, and is in itself a monumental answer to those who doubted. In the case of Mesopotamia it would certainly be necessary for the British Government to exert pressure at the Porte to secure a guarantee for the protection of the interests of those concerned, after first securing a concession for such an enterprise. Without a knowledge that the British Government was behind them it would be absurd to expect British capitalists to move in such an undertaking.

No one will be found to-day to deny the beneficial results to Egypt of the monster dam of Assouan, and Sir William Willcocks could hardly have given a more alluring description of the potentialities of Egypt than he has of Chaldæa. "Of all the regions of the earth no region is more favoured by nature for the production of cereals than the lands of the Tigris. . . . Cotton, sugar-cane, Indian corn, and all the summer products of cereals, leguminous plants, Egyptian clover, opium, and tobacco will find themselves at home as they do in Egypt." Perhaps, after all, we should not accuse Herodotus of exaggeration when he wrote: "This is of all lands with which we are acquainted by far the best for the growth of corn. . . . It is so fruitful in the produce of corn that it yields continually two hundred-fold, and when it produces its best, it yields even three hundred-fold. The blades of wheat and barley grow there to full four fingers in breadth; and though I well know to what a height millet and sesame grow, I shall not mention it, for I am well assured that, to those who have never been in the Babylonian country, what has

been said concerning its productions will appear to many incredible!"[1]

Perhaps when the schemes of Sir William Willcocks have been carried out, and corn is yielding three hundredfold, and millet and sesame are growing to a height which even Herodotus would be unwilling to commit to writing, it will at last begin to dawn upon Downing Street that the dividends of any future Baghdad Railway will not be dependent solely upon a somewhat hypothetical through traffic to India.

On the morning of the seventh day after embarking at Mossul, the buildings of Baghdad came into sight, at the far end of a long vista of palm-trees, and a few hours later I left my floating domicile, and installed myself in the capital.

As I have pointed out already in chap. i., any one who comes to the present capital of Chaldæa expecting to find in it some semblance of the Baghdad of his imagination will be rudely disappointed. It must be admitted that the magnificence and romance of Baghdad lie almost entirely in tradition,—the hopelessly commonplace buildings and bazaars on either bank of the river affording an entirely inadequate setting to the lives of Harun-al-Raschid and the Khalifs, or to the engrossing scenes of the 'Arabian Nights.' The palm-trees which line the river banks and give a certain picturesqueness to the town cease with abrupt suddenness immediately the river is left; and all round, encroaching upon the very houses of the city itself, the mournful desolation common to uncultivated ground in lands where, for half the year, a scorching sun looks down from a brazen sky, and where 120° in the shade is no uncommon reading of the thermometer in summer, reigns supreme.

As far as the town itself is concerned, there can be

[1] Herodotus, Book I. chap. 193.

few who will not agree with Sir F. Goldsmid when he says that "the streets are narrow, dirty, gloomy, and irregular;"[1] or again, when he opines that the occasional prettily-domed mosque is, after all, "painfully like a crockery *fingan*, or coffee-cup, of the blue flower pattern."[2] The river is perhaps the most attractive feature of the town, being covered with native craft of all sorts, and presenting a scene of lively animation. Conspicuous among them are the curious round *guffas*, a form of boat which appears to have remained constant since the days of Herodotus. From the appearance of the vessel in question, a specimen of which may be seen in the foreground of the photograph here reproduced, it will be observed how accurately the description given by that historian fits at the present day: "Their vessels that sail down the river to Babylon are circular, and made of leather. For when they have cut the ribs out of willows that grow in Armenia above Babylon, they cover them with hides extended on the outside, by way of a bottom; neither making any distinction in the stern, nor contracting the prow, but making them circular like a buckler."[3]

Is Baghdad, then, a great commercial centre? The answer may be given in the affirmative, provided you qualify it with the all-important words "for Turkey." The whole of the surrounding country is fed by Baghdad, as also are many of the markets of Western Persia, notably those of Kermanshah and Hamadan; but they are not fed to the extent that they ought to be: firstly, because of lack of communications other than mule-tracks; and, secondly, because of obstruction on the part of the Turkish Government, where assistance and en-

[1] Telegraph and Travel. Sir F. Goldsmid.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Herodotus, Book I. chap. 194.

couragement should naturally be looked for. Railways there are none, if I except the short tramway which runs a few miles to the Mosque of Kazimin, and which I believe is a great success financially; and the number of steamers which ply between Baghdad and Basra is limited to four, two of which may generally be counted on as being *hors de combat*, since they are run by a Turkish firm.

Enterprise is likely to meet with a sharp rebuke, as instanced by the fate of the Pasha who, a short time ago, built an excellent bridge which spans the river at the present time. Great were the preparations for the opening of this work of public benefit. The crowds assembled, and expectation ran high; but, alas! no governor appeared to perform the opening ceremony. It was a great pity, but it was inevitable. The broad-minded governor had been mentioned by the mullah in public prayer as a benefactor to his country, and his fame had reached the ears of the Sublime Porte. His immediate recall was the result. The Sultan can brook no interference in his monopoly of the deity!

The trade of Baghdad in 1902 amounted to £2,560,232, divided as follows: Exports, £575,253, and imports, £1,984,979. This trade might be greatly increased even at the present time by so simple a procedure as insisting upon the Porte removing the absurd limitation of two steamers a-week, which is all that is allowed to Messrs Lynch. It seems a most extraordinary thing that we should be powerless to effect so necessary a step. Not very long ago permission was obtained by Messrs Lynch to draw a barge along with their steamers, but this was regarded as a great diplomatic triumph! The result, as pointed out by Major Newmarch, acting British Consul-General, is that the delay in Basra, more especially since there is a want of

proper go-downs and cover for goods while waiting there, is a serious matter, and most detrimental to the entire trade of the province. I was informed by a friend that he had seen as much as 8000 tons of merchandise lying waiting transportation at Basra at one time; and it is no doubt perfectly true, as Mr Whigham has said, that goods are as often six months on the way from London to Baghdad as not.[1]

But this is not the only objection to entire absence of competition on the Tigris. At the time of my visit competition had lowered the rate of freight from London to Basra to about 15s. per ton,[2] while absence of competition had raised it between Basra and Baghdad to from £2 to £2, 5s. per ton! Thus we see the astounding phenomenon of the freight of goods from Basra to Baghdad, a distance roughly of 500 miles, amounting to nearly four times the freight of goods from London to Basra! On the journey back from Baghdad a different state of things exists, since native craft carry a good deal of stuff down-stream, and the charge is reduced to about 12s.

These few facts alone are sufficient to show that the trade of Baghdad is not what it might be, even under existing circumstances. Were the purchasing power of the people to be increased by the realisation of some such scheme as that of Sir William Willcocks, it is obvious that a very large increase would speedily accrue.

British control from Baghdad to the Gulf should be the watchword of British diplomacy in this particular square of the board, and, of course, railway

[1] The Persian Problem. H. J. Whigham.

[2] This was the figure given me by a merchant. Major Newmarch gives the figure for 1902 as from £1, 17s. 6d. to £2.

construction comes under this head. Why such a line was not built years ago is a mystery, but the fact remains that it was not. The time for monopoly has gone by; let us at least see to it that we secure control of any future extension of the Baghdad railway from that place to the sea.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BAGHDAD RAILWAY.

Railway projects in the past—The success of Germany—Lack of interest of British Government in the past—English concessions pass to other countries—The prophecy of the deputation of 1857—The German commission of 1899—The concession of 1902—Proposed route of the line—Branch lines—Description of the country through which the line will pass—The Taurus barrier—Possibilities of Asia Minor—Lawlessness of Mesopotamia—Important towns all lie to the north—The right bank of the Tigris preferred to the left—Centres of pilgrimage—Points to be remembered in criticising the line—The financial prospect—International complications—Germanophobia in England—The line as an alternative route for the Indian mails—The conditions upon which Great Britain must insist as essential to her co-operation—The position of Great Britain with regard to the railway—The state of affairs at the present time.

If there is much that is wearisome in a journey through the Asiatic dominions of the Sultan, there is also much that is of considerable interest, as I hope may have been made clear by a perusal of the foregoing chapters; but the problem of supreme interest to myself, and I have no doubt to many others as well, which is brought under consideration in the course of a journey such as I have already described, in that its solution is likely to have a vital effect for good or for evil upon the fortunes of Great Britain in Asia, has yet to be dealt with: and since a desire to acquaint myself as fully as possible with the possi-

bilities and probabilities, as affecting this country, of any future railway to the Persian Gulf alone determined the direction of my journey, I have no hesitation in setting before my readers the situation in connection with the so-called "Baghdad railway," as I understand it at the present time.

And when considering the prospects of a railway which is to connect Constantinople with the Persian Gulf, it is impossible to help recalling the long story of brilliant inception which distinguishes the part played by Great Britain at intervals during a period of upwards of sixty years, in an endeavour to inaugurate a system of direct land communication between Europe and the seas of Southern Asia, or to refrain from indulging in a lament at the remorseless regularity with which the lifelong efforts of more than one patriotic Englishman were destined to flicker out in a pitiable succession of unrewarded and abortive endeavour. The attempts made during the first half of the nineteenth century to navigate the Euphrates, a relic of which may still be seen in the garden of the British Consulate at Aleppo, in the shape of the small guns with which the steamers were to have been fitted, followed during the early years of the latter half by the railway schemes inseparably connected with the names of Chesney and Andrew; the reawakening of public interest a few years later in a short road to the East, which led to the drawing up of a report by a select committee, and again early in the last quarter of the waning century, as indicated by the formation of the "Euphrates Valley Railway Association," pass successively across the scene, to terminate in an attempt by a group, chiefly English, to obtain a concession, up to the very time that the telegram was despatched to the Emperor William

at Windsor, granting to a German syndicate a concession to draw up a report concerning the construction of an iron way, which would pass through the heart of the Asiatic dominions of the autocrat at Yildiz, and forge the much-talked-of link which was to complete the chain of railroad communication from Paris to the Persian Gulf,

I have always regarded it as a cause for regret that, despite the untiring efforts of such pioneers of empire, England failed to construct the railway advocated. The British Government could by no means be induced to look favourably upon the scheme, and without the countenance of the Government British capitalists fought shy. Moreover, at no time did British railway enterprise receive that measure of approbation from the Porte which that body has been pleased to display towards the schemes of other nations. When Great Britain was alone in the field, British promoters paid scant attention to the wishes of the Porte, and calmly ignored the fact that a railway with its terminus on the Levant, many hundreds of miles from the Turkish capital, was regarded with little favour by the Government through whose territory it was intended that it should pass.

As time went on rival Powers entered upon the field of railway expansion in the Near East, and not only did the proposed trunk line fail to assume material form, but other railways originally English passed slowly but surely into other hands, so that, whereas the Mersina-Adana, the Smyrna-Aidin, the Smyrna-Cassaba, and the Haida-Pasha-Ismid lines were all in the first instance built with English capital and English material and under English management, the Smyrna-Aidin line is the solitary English concern remaining at the present day. Such a state

of affairs, to whatever it may have been due,—and it was due to various causes which I need not enter into here,—has undoubtedly been detrimental to British influence and trade; but what is perhaps of even greater moment at the present time is the fact that the words of the deputation which waited upon Lord Palmerston in 1857, to the effect that the Euphrates Valley Railway would pass into other hands if Great Britain declined the task, have at length been fulfilled.

Little good, however, is now to be gained by indulging in lamentation over neglected opportunities of the past; rather is it of more profit to make some attempt to inquire into the probabilities of the future, and to consider in what way and to what extent the interests of our own country are likely to be affected by the project known as the "Baghdad Railway Scheme."

As a result, then, of the preliminary concession of 1899, a committee was appointed with a view to surveying and reporting upon the country through which the line would pass, and was occupied from the middle of September 1899 to the beginning of April 1900 in conducting a practical examination on the spot. As evidence of the success of their labours came the news of the concession of January 1902 for the extension of the existing line between Haida-Pasha and Konia to Baghdad and the Persian Gulf. Now, in treating of the *route* to be followed by the future line, I would qualify any statement that I may make by the remark that I consider that he would be a bold seer who ventured to prophesy with any degree of confidence regarding it; but for the purposes of the agreement a line was sketched out which will pass through the country as follows: from Konia it will pass by Karaman to Eregli, from which point it will enter the Bulgar Dagh, and by many loops and

tunnels compass the descent of the 3400 feet to the Cilician plain. In the course of this descent of the Taurus it will not, as popularly supposed, pass through the famous Cilician Gates, but will follow the course of a small river, the Tchakid Su, east of the pass, and thence debouch on to the plain. Crossing the level expanse of Cilicia by Adana—already connected with the sea by the Mersina-Tarsus-Adana line, forty miles in length—it will encounter the only other great physical obstacle which will be met with, in the shape of the Giaour Dagh. This range will be crossed either by the Arslani Bell above Bagché, necessitating an ascent of upwards of 3000 feet, or by the ridge above the village of Hassan Beyli to the south of Bagché. Personally I crossed by the latter, and it appeared to me that a tunnel might be made here at no very great cost, considerably lessening the ascent, and the descent to the valley of the Kara Su on the far side. Having reached the valley of the Kara Su, a remarkable stretch of ground extending practically from Marash in the north to Antioch in the south, part marsh, part cultivation, and part woodland, it will turn south to the extremity of the Kurt Dagh, and rounding the latter, reach Killis, a small town situated at the foot of the mountains. Between the valley of the Kara Su and the Euphrates, which will be crossed about 20 kilometres south of Birejik, the low ridges which enclose the basins of the Afrin, the Kowaik, and the Sajur intervene; but these are of no great height, and will offer little resistance to the engineers. From the Euphrates, which will require a considerable bridge, the line might almost have been drawn with a ruler to the Tigris at Mossul, passing only the insignificant villages of Harran, Ras-el-Ain, and Nissibin on the way. From Mossul to Baghdad the right bank of the

Tigris will be followed; but from the latter place the line will turn south-west to the Euphrates, and, crossing that river for the second time, reach the Gulf by Kerbela and Zobair, the suggested terminus being Kasima on the bay of Koweit.

So much for the direction to be followed by the main line. The branch lines included in the concession are as follows: (1) from Tel Habesch, a little east of Killis to Aleppo, a distance of 60 kilometres; (2) from Sadiyeh on the Tigris to Khanikin on the Persian frontier, 115 kilometres; (3) from Zobair to Basra, 19 kilometres. A branch line is also to be built in the future, when the receipts of the main line admit of it, to Diarbekr, and a *temporary* line for construction purposes is to be taken from the main line in the Cilician plain to some point on the Gulf of Alexandretta, probably Yumurta'ik on the bay of Ayas. I have already given some description of the country in the course of the preceding narrative, but before discussing the questions which are suggested by a consideration of such a line in all its bearings, it may be well to recapitulate briefly the particulars of such description which bear directly upon the construction of the railway.

The direct road from Konia to Eregli lies across the eastern extremity of the Axylon plain, which presents to the eye an expanse of savage sterility which can scarcely claim for itself any other term than that of desert. For this reason the line makes a bend by Karaman, more fortunate in being situated on the fringe of the desert than Karabunar, a small village which stands in the centre midway between Konia and Eregli. It is at this latter place that the Bulgar Dagh will be entered, and between here and Adana that the descent of the Taurus will present a formidable though

by no means insurmountable obstacle to the engineer. The main artery leading south from the important commercial centre of Kaisariyeh will be cut at Porsuk, and the long strings of camels—I passed something like a thousand in the course of a single day returning lightly laden from the coast—which now bear burdens of hides and grain, passing with silent ghostly tread over the highway of conquering armies of the past, must ere long give place to the iron horse. As far as the bridge over the Tchakid Su at Ak Keupri it will follow the existing road, and in so doing will encounter no engineering difficulty greater than that afforded by a gradient of, at the outside, 1 in 80;[1] but from here on the caravan road must be left, and the one serious difficulty of the whole line is soon afterwards encountered in a vast mountain wall nearly 2000 feet in height, with hardly any room for curves in surmounting it, which rises between the valley of the Tchakid Su and the Cilician plain.[2] I was informed by an engineer who had accompanied the Commission of 1899 that as many as seventy tunnels would be required in surmounting this obstacle, but the preliminary survey was admittedly a rough one, and a further detailed survey will have to be undertaken before this section of the line is constructed.

Arrived at the foot of the mountains, it is natural to inquire why, when there is already a railway to the sea, another line—the *temporary* branch I have already spoken of—should be required, tapping the identical

[1] Professor Ramsay writes as follows: "Once placed at the northern end of the pass, the line has a gentle descent down a continuous easy glen—interrupted only once by a ridge of no serious consequence—for about 35 miles. In those 35 miles the descent is only about 2200 feet, giving, without any zigzags, a gradient of 1 in 80, roughly speaking."—Journal of the Royal Geographical Society for October 1903.

[2] The Tchakid Su escapes through an underground channel.

district. The answer is to be found partly in the fact of some hitch having arisen in the negotiations for buying up the line entered upon by the German company, and partly in the unsuitableness of Mersina as a port. A demand was long since made, it is true, by the promoters of the Mersina-Adana Railway for a concession for improving the port by means of a breakwater, but this, victim perhaps of the intrigue of rival schemes, still lies with many another in the dead letter office at Yildiz. From the description given in chap. iv. it will have been gathered that in Cilicia the Government have so far displayed an extraordinary aptitude for burying their talent in the ground, and further comment is unnecessary here. Passing mention has also been made of the probable line of ascent and descent of the range of the Giaour Dagh. Though a system of no great width, the traveller crossing it will find ample grounds for singing its praises, the snow-bound wall of the higher peaks standing out in sharp contrast above the lower slopes, clothed with a mantle of mountain laurel, box, and ilex bushes.

In the vicinity of Killis vast groves of olives fill the view, and the rolling expanse between that place and Aleppo presents a broad smiling stretch of well-cultivated plain.

From this description it will be gathered that thus far the line will pass through a country of vast latent possibilities, which is blessed even now by considerable agricultural and commercial development[1] and some of

[1] As evidence of the development of the country by railways, see the report published by the Public Debt Administration in 1903, wherein it is estimated that the tithes of the districts traversed or affected by the railways have increased in the last twelve years by 46 per cent. According to Consul Waugh, the Angora district, which exported no grain before the railway was opened, now has an annual export of wheat and barley valued at from £1,500,000 to £2,000,000.

the elements of public security; but it is to be feared that from here on to Baghdad the country to be traversed can boast neither of the one nor of the other. After crossing the Euphrates and the low ridge of Jebel Tek-Tek, the line will run through a country consisting of a practically featureless steppe, whose rolling undulations succeed one another with monotonous regularity. Nor would it appear that the lack of natural attraction has been compensated for by the art of man, the mouldering ruins, which are in keeping everywhere with the forlorn aspect of the scene, bearing eloquent testimony to the wild depredations of Kurd and Arab, who from the days of their first contact seem to have regarded the plains of northern Mesopotamia as a legitimate stage for the enactment of a drama of wholesale bloodshed and destruction. Indeed, Ibrahim Pasha, on the west, and, until his recent violent death, Mustapha Pasha, on the east, might well congratulate themselves on being far from unworthy recipients of the mantle of Timur, who five centuries earlier stamped upon this self-same district an indelible trail of desolation — inevitable legacy of his victorious progress through Asia.

On such a line no places of importance will be found. Harran, the ancient city of Nahor, to which Abraham migrated from Ur of the Chaldees, consists now of a low range of mounds on either side of the river Belik, whose chief object of interest is, probably, the far-famed well of Rebecca. Ras-el-Ain is only a small village, and Nissibin a moderate mud town. No advantage, then, for this route can be claimed on the grounds of its passing through any large centres of trade, all of which—Marash, Aintab, Birejik, Urfa, Diarbekr, Mardin—lie far to the north, and the whole advantage which it offers is summed up in directness of

line and absence of physical obstruction. Such opposition as will be encountered in this section will be provided by paucity of water, dust-storms, and the raids of a lawless and migratory population, more especially if history repeats itself, and it is found in the case of the future railway, as has been found in the case of those already constructed, that, to use the words of Mr Hogarth, "the primary result of an extension of railways in Anatolia has always been an extension of brigandage."

Mossul itself is a town of some importance, being the largest centre in northern Mesopotamia; but it is hardly probable that the goods which are now floated down the river on rafts will not continue to be so in the future, more especially since the wood forming a large portion of the raft is sold at a profit at the end of the journey. Moreover, the country on the right bank of the river through which the line will run is almost entirely desert, roamed over by the Shammar Arabs, the promoters being of opinion, seemingly, that the saving of distance and modest opposition afforded by the few dessicated waddies and low ridges encountered on the right bank more than compensate for the greater promise offered by the fertile lands of the left, more especially since the difference in cost between the two routes is estimated at approximately 76,000,000 francs. As it is, there is little prospect for many years to come of any greater effect from its construction in these parts being attained than a slight increase in the local reputation of the hot baths at Hammum Ali and some small growth in the few mud villages which hug the river bank.

South of Baghdad the country between the two great rivers is too marshy to admit of rails being laid, and the Euphrates will have to be crossed once more,

and its right bank followed to the Gulf. The great centres of pilgrimage—Kazimin, Nejef, and Kerbela—will be passed, and high expectations are set on the receipts which it is anticipated will accrue from the vast numbers of pilgrims, estimated at 100,000 annually, bearing an average number of 60,000 corpses to be entombed in proximity to the departed saints,—the Imams Musa, Ali, and Hussein. At first sight it would appear that land transport could never compete successfully with the existing water-way from Baghdad to the Gulf; but it must be remembered that, so far, British diplomacy has only succeeded in obtaining permission for Messrs Lynch to run one steamer a-week on these waters, while the only other company running steamers, being Turkish, need hardly be considered. Even in face of this puny competition the promoters have proved their business capacity by securing under article ix. of the Convention of March 1903 the right during construction to acquire and use steam and sailing vessels and other craft on the Shatt-el-Arab, the Tigris, and the Euphrates, for the transport of materials and other requirements, while under article xxiii. the company has the right of establishing ports at Baghdad, Basra, and the terminal point on the Persian Gulf.

In making any criticism of such a line, it must be remembered that those responsible for it were confronted by a variety of considerations. The obvious route from Adana, for instance, along the coast to the port of Alexandretta, thence over the Beylan Pass to Aleppo, had to be discarded on the grounds of its exposure to attack from the sea, similar considerations being responsible for the refusal of the Sultan to sanction a permanent branch to the coast. I have italicised the word temporary in this connection,

because it is impossible to suppose that the shrewd promoters of the scheme will consent to its removal when once it has been built, since without such a branch it would be folly to imagine that they could compete with the existing camel transport between Alexandretta and Aleppo.

The most glaring defect, however, which is likely to strike any one looking at the project from a commercial point of view, is the persistent way in which all the large towns of Northern Mesopotamia are left severely on one side. Here, again, those responsible had much to take into consideration. On economic grounds, as far as actual construction was concerned, the more southern *tracé* was far preferable, avoiding as it did the mountainous districts in which are situated the larger towns, while to the Turk, sublimely disdainful of commercial returns, the shortest route connecting the 6th army corps at Baghdad with the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd at Constantinople, Adrianople, and Monastir, and, when the Damascus-Aleppo line, already constructed as far as Hamah, is completed, with the 5th at Damascus, seemed distinctly the most desirable. Nor must it be forgotten that that Power which was careful to exact from the Sultan an agreement for the monopoly of railway construction in the Black Sea basin has used its powerful influence at Yildiz to frustrate any scheme which might form the basis of an effective zone of defence and offence on the north-eastern frontier of the Ottoman Empire.[1]

[1] As part of a scheme of Turkish defence, Colonel Mark Bell advocated in the 'Journal of the Royal United Service Institution' of September 1899 the construction of two main lines as follows: (1) Starting from Iskanderun or some neighbouring post on the Mediterranean, and proceeding *viâ* Aleppo, Birejik, and Urfa; (2) running from the northern post of Samsun through Tokat, Sivas, Kharput, and Diarbekr, so as to join the western line at Mardin. Herein is to be found in part the explanation

As regards the southern extremity of the line, looked at from the point of view of local development, it may be said that in the Baghdad and Basra districts there is a country of vast potential wealth; but it may with equal truth be said that until the nomadic propensities of the population are given up for those of a settled existence, and the whole country rejoices in the benefits of law and order to a degree which it is to be feared will not be attained under the existing *régime*, there is little prospect of Chaldæa revelling once more in the abundant prosperity of an almost forgotten past.

If, then, the probability of immediate returns from local development is not great, it must not be supposed that those whose duty it has been to estimate the prospects from a financial point of view have deceived themselves as to the probable result. Hard-headed men of business, qualified to form a right judgment, are of opinion that working expenses will be covered, though no surplus will for some time be forthcoming, and it is unlikely therefore that the line will be built until these same men of business see where the promised State guarantee, amounting in all to something like £1,000,000 per annum, is to come from.

And here it is that complications of an international nature arise, and here that Great Britain will eventually have to come to a decision one way or the other—to assume an aspect of friendly co-operation or of hostile opposition. For though it was at one time hoped that a considerable sum might be available for the purposes of the guarantee from the conversion and unification of the Ottoman public debt, it is now generally recognised

of the Black Sea Basin Convention, and the southern *tracé* of the German line. It is worth remembering that the Russian Tugovitch proposed that Russia herself should build the Baghdad line, a suggestion, however, which, despite the supposed favour shown towards it by M. de Witte, was negatived by the Cabinet.

that such guarantee can only be found from an increase of the import duties, which increase cannot be secured without the contraction of new commercial treaties. Any such increased revenue could now be applied to any purpose the Sultan thought fit, since under the conversion and unification scheme, recently consummated, the bondholders gave up the exclusive lien on any fresh revenue resulting from any increase in the import duty which was theirs by right of article viii. of the Decree of Moharrem (December 8, 1881).

At the present time we may safely assume that Germany is the only Power that has signified her acquiescence in a revision of the existing commercial treaty, and that while France, Austria, and Italy are willing to do so, England and Russia object. There is no occasion to discuss the attitude of Russia beyond remarking that a due consideration paid to her large export of corn and oil, when any future tariff is framed, will probably suffice to obtain her consent to it. England, whose trade with Turkey is far larger than that of any other single country, has reasonable grounds for raising objection to any alteration in the existing fiscal arrangements which may affect her trade adversely. But let it not be forgotten that such a scheme as this must be looked at from the broader point of view of imperial policy, and it is to be hoped that it will be found possible for us to pursue a course of cordial co-operation given in return for certain privileges—in other words, that, in return for our waiving all objections to a revision of the customs tariff, and for our providing facilities for the acquisition of a terminus on the Gulf, we are allotted an equal share of the capital, and receive *adequate* representation on the Board.

It is of course impossible to be blind to the fact that there is in England at the present time a certain school

of political thought to whose followers the word German is as a thing accursed, and who are so blinded by their Germanophobia that the mere suggestion of any enterprise undertaken in concert with that Power evokes from them a chorus of hysterical denunciation. Nevertheless, when a decision has to be made, it must and will be made without reference to the ephemeral jealousies of prejudiced politicians. Let me at once admit that I have no desire whatsoever to see any formal alliance contracted with Germany, any more than with any other Continental Power; but to work in friendly co-operation with the people of another nation in a mission of civilisation is a totally different thing from being bound by the chains of a formal alliance, and to put unnecessary obstacles in the way of any scheme which tends to improve and bring the ameliorating influences of civilisation within reach of a people who are in sore need of them is to renounce the high mission which it has ever been the pride of England to uphold. Nor from a material point of view would such an arrangement be devoid of mutual benefit. Any scheme which tends to defer the partition of Turkey—for it must be borne in mind that I am discussing the line on the assumption that it is an international enterprise—is to the advantage of Great Britain, since the integrity of Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan has been the dominating note of her policy in the Near East, nor can any undertaking which tends to quicken commerce be anything but advantageous to the nation that holds the lion's share, provided of course that preferential treatment to particular nations is disallowed. In addition, the participation of England would secure for our own manufacturers orders for a proportion of the requisite material for construction.

The original promoters of the scheme would, on the

other hand, profit by the support England could give to the traffic in the shape of a contract for the Indian mails. It is calculated that, provided an improved service of steamers were run from the terminus on the Persian Gulf to Kurrachi, a saving of 3 days 16½ hours would be effected on the present 14 days 16 hours to India; and, estimating the subsidy now given to the P. and O. Company for carrying the mails to India at £90,000, an increase of about 500 francs per kilometre would accrue. The tendency of passenger traffic is likewise to follow the mails, and in addition to a saving of nearly four days, it can be shown that the first-class fare would be reduced from £72 to £61.

It is of course possible that in renewing the contract with the P. and O. Company the Government might stipulate for a higher rate of speed than the present 14½ knots, and were 19 knots attained the post to India would occupy only eleven days. Many who, in common with myself, have passed through the irritating experience of having to slow down to half speed to avoid reaching Bombay before the appointed day, can testify to the ease with which the speed of the P. and O. service might be increased; but to attain a uniform speed of 19 knots would doubtless entail an enormously increased consumption of coal and consequent expenditure, for which there would appear to be no call.[1]

From what I have written above it might perhaps be inferred that I was disappointed at the decision of his Majesty's Government, made known

[1] It is gratifying to learn from Sir E. Law's speech on the Indian budget in March of this year that the English mail contract with the P. and O. Company has been renewed for a period of three years, on condition that the mails are to be delivered twenty-four hours earlier at either end.

in the House of Commons on April 23, 1903. Let me hasten to dissipate any such inference. My desire to see British co-operation is prompted not by any quixotic goodwill towards Germany, but by the necessity, which is plainly apparent, of protecting our own interests. Nothing could be more fatuous than for us to look quietly on, while a railway in the hands of two foreign nations, "with whom," to quote the words of the Prime Minister, "we are on the most friendly terms, but whose interests may not be identical with our own," is being pushed right down to a sea with which we are so closely concerned as the Persian Gulf. And so I urge co-operation, in order that the railway may become an international undertaking, and that Great Britain may have that voice in the matter which, in view of her special interests, she is entitled to demand. But though I urge co-operation I urge it upon certain conditions, because I realise that Great Britain is in a position to dictate. On no account should the Government consent to further the undertaking without the certainty of securing equal powers of construction, management, and control. I have elsewhere urged that the section from Baghdad to the gulf should be placed in British hands;[1] but should this prove impracticable, the conditions as stated above should, provided we maintain our supremacy in the gulf, prove adequate to safeguard our interests. It was because these conditions were not guaranteed that the Government refused their support in the spring of 1903, and it is because I am convinced that in the end these conditions will be offered that I welcome the decision which was then come to.

[1] In an article written for 'The Times' of April 9, 1903.

I have said that Great Britain is in a position to dictate, because I believe that, in spite of the emphatic declaration of Mr Balfour in the House of Commons on April 8, 1903, that "the project will ultimately be carried out, with or without our having a share in it," it will not see realisation in the face of the uncompromising opposition of this country. Great Britain holds two trump-cards: firstly, in the opposition she can raise to any revision of the customs —and the Deutsche Bank must eventually realise that the favourable attitude of Great Britain is a necessity; and, secondly, in our position of ascendancy at Koweit. When the extension is built from Baghdad to the Persian Gulf, it will most assuredly be of England's grace and not of England's necessity. We can afford, then, to content ourselves, as our Russian friends would say, "with quietly awaiting the further development of events," and we may rest assured that such further development of events, however long deferred, will take the form of renewed advances to Great Britain. When an offer is made which recognises the principle of equal powers of construction, management, and control, then will come the time for Great Britain to take up that share in the promotion of the Baghdad railway which, I have not the slightest doubt, is destined to be hers.

It may be well before concluding this chapter to explain the position at the present moment. Affairs have advanced to the extent that a new company has been created, with the title of the "Imperial Ottoman Baghdad Railway Company," and an amended form of the convention of January 1902 concluded (March 5, 1903). An arrangement, which may be regarded as temporary, has been arrived at by which France

and Germany are each responsible for 40 per cent of the capital sum, in order that the first section of the extension from Konia may be embarked upon. This section of 200 kilometres, from Konia to the village of Bulgurlu, five miles beyond Eregli, is now in process of construction. By the middle of March the railhead had reached a point 50 kilometres beyond Eregli, and was advancing at the rate of a kilometre a-day; and the whole distance is likely to see completion by September of the present year. According to Consul Waugh, the company receives bonds from the Turkish Government to the amount of 54,000,000 francs, bearing interest at 4 per cent, with a sinking fund, which will extinguish the loan in ninety-eight years, the term of the concession of the railway, in guarantee of the cost of construction of this section. He further adds, in his report of the trade of Constantinople and district for 1903, that "failing sufficient surplus from the receipts of the line, the service of the loan, which is equivalent to a kilometric guarantee of 11,000 francs, is to be met by an annual charge of £106,000 on certain tithe revenues."

So the first section will be built without any difficulty, and, moreover, under the above-mentioned arrangement, the company expect to reimburse themselves for all expenses contracted up to the present time, so that with the completion of the line to the edge of the Taurus Mountains, the company will be in a position to start anew with a clean slate. Whether any further progress will be made under existing circumstances is open to doubt, for the difficult and expensive section through the Taurus Mountains looms large in the foreground, and I am inclined to think that if further progress is made it will be in connection with a section in the vicinity of Aleppo. It might

appear that the stipulation that the line is to be constructed in eight years would necessitate its continuation without delay; but it must be remembered that the convention has been drawn up by wily Germans, who knew perfectly well what they were about. This stipulation is, in the first place, dependent on the punctual fulfilment by the Government of its financial obligations towards the *concessionaire;* and, secondly, is subject to delays arising from *force majeure,* and the definition given of *force majeure* is a curious one: "Seront également considérés comme cas de force majeure une guerre entre Puissances Européennes, *ainsi qu'un changement capital dans la situation financière de l'Allemagne, de l'Angleterre ou de la France.*" The convention abounds with curious provisions of a similar nature, safeguarding the *concessionaire,* and it is perfectly easy, as a friend of mine remarked, to drive a carriage-and-pair through it anywhere.

Such in brief is the Baghdad railway question. The review which I have given of it makes no pretension to being exhaustive, but space does not admit of a more detailed account. The objects which I have kept more especially in view have been, firstly, to point out that the country through which such a railway will pass cannot fail in the future—though that future may be a distant one—to benefit enormously by its construction, from the point of view both of internal development and of expansion of trade; secondly, to explain the position of Great Britain with regard to it; and, lastly, to give a warning to any one who takes any interest in the question against being led astray from the real issues at stake by the prejudiced utterances of Germanophobe orators, or the irresponsible ebullitions of a Germanophobe press.

PERSIA

"Clime of the unforgotten brave!
Whose land from plain to mountain cave
Was freedom's home or glory's grave
Shrine of the mighty! Can it be
That this is all remains of thee?"

—BYRON.

CHAPTER IX.

BAGHDAD TO KERMANSHAH.

Persian characteristics—Methods of travel in Persia—Interesting monuments of Western Persia—Nature of country on the Turkish border—The legends of Shirin—Man walled up alive—The Darcy concession—A strange dinner-party—The ascent to the Persian highlands—A late winter—Reach Kermanshah—Strategic position of—Population—Persian amenities!—The *nakarreh khaneh*—The rock sculptures of Bostan—Description of—Inscriptions—Disfigurement of panels—Opinion of the late Shah concerning—Other remains.

"THE springs of the Tearus yield the best and finest water of all rivers; and a man, the best and finest of all men, came to them, Darius, son of Hystaspes, King of the Persians and of the whole continent." Thus Darius—at least so says Herodotus, though we are all of course entitled to our own opinion as to how far Herodotus wrote history and how far story. I have recalled the above, because the trait which prompted a Persian 2400 years ago to cause such an inscription to be chiselled on stone is so palpable in a very large number of the dwellers in that country to-day. I was once discussing various episodes in the history of Anglo-Persian relations in the past with a gentleman in a position of authority, and I happened to remark that I hoped if ever England and Persia were again involved in war, that it would be side by side that their soldiers would be fighting, and not in opposition as once before. "Yes, indeed," replied my friend, "you have good reason

for hoping so, for my men here are certainly the equal of ten Europeans"! Without seeing the said men you could not enjoy the full force of the remark. The noble bearer of the Garter to his Majesty the Shah, who was saluted with a broken table-leg on passing one of the State sentries on guard, would appreciate it. Another historian has handed it down that the Persians of his day were taught to ride, to shoot, and to speak the truth. Not all these characteristics have withstood the test of time. I came to an agreement with a Persian muleteer to supply me with transport, and personally to conduct me as far as Teherân. The day fixed for departure came and with it the mule-man, who begged me to proceed a short day's journey without him as he had business in the town; and with an assurance that he would overtake us on the morrow, he bade us God-speed. That was the last I ever saw of my Persian friend, which is an example of what I mean.

But, for the most part, as far as travelling in Persia goes, it might still be the days of the historian of Halicarnassus. You are in the East unredeemed and unregenerate. There are not many parts of the country, for instance, in which you can expect to make a journey corresponding to that, say, from Edinburgh to London in much less than a month, and then only at an expenditure of much labour and forethought. On the post-roads you may travel fast—fast, that is, for Persia, and may cover as much as from 90 to 100 miles in a day if you reduce your baggage to a minimum, and can coax your jaded spirit and weary limbs to resign themselves to the tender mercies of the Persian post-horse for so long. But the number of post-roads is limited, and where there is no post-road, or in the event of your having more worldly goods than can

be conveniently strapped on to a galloping pony, you must travel as the patriarchs of old, with the immemorial camel or the hard-worked baggage-mule. It can of course be claimed as an advantage that travelling thus one sees far more of the country than would be possible otherwise; and the country I was about to travel through was of exceptional interest, whether looked at from the point of view of the lover of strange records from the past, or from that of the speculator as to the political possibilities of the future. In the magnificent rock sculptures near Kermanshah the lover of the antique will find ample reward for his journey; while twenty miles farther on, high up on the precipitous rock-cliffs of Piru, stand inscribed the imperishable records of Darius, which proclaim to the world to-day, as confidently as when first cut upon the face of the rock 2400 years ago, the achievements of one of the mightiest monarchs of the past. The more practical mind, bent on inquiry into trade and commercial returns, will find ample material to occupy attention, while an added interest is to be found in the fact that here lies the most probable line of a Trans-continental railway which some of us may yet live to see.

Between Baghdad and the Persian frontier there is little that calls for remark. You travel for ninety miles across the level plain of Chaldæa, crossing only three insignificant ridges as you draw towards the frontier. Round Baghdad is displayed a panorama which is mournful and irretrievably monotonous—one, that is to say, with which the traveller in the East is likely to become painfully familiar. Dry, dusty, drab-coloured desert is the only description that can be given of the country that stretches eastward from Baghdad, though desert only because uncultivated. It would probably be difficult to find soil that would give better value in

return for water and a modicum of labour. Presently the palm-girt banks of the Diala rise uncertainly on the horizon, and after crossing the river by a bridge of boats your way lies through a zone of partial cultivation which, thanks to the proximity of the river, extends up to the frontier. The small towns of Yakubieh, Shahraban, Kizil Robat, and Khanikin, all buried in palm-trees, afford you shelter for the night, where solemn, long-legged storks occupy every house-roof, cutting quaint figures as they stand motionless with one leg tucked up, sharply silhouetted against the golden background of the western sky.

By the time you reach Khanikin you have discovered several errors in the guide-book; but let me not be hypercritical, for after all the wonderful thing is that there should be a guide-book at all.

After crossing the frontier, which you recognise by a small round tower, the country becomes broken with low hills, which culminate in the rugged peaks and savage mountain gorges of Kurdistan. On the right bank of the Hulvan, prettily situated on a steep hillside, stands Kasr-i-Shirin, the first town encountered in Persia, and likewise the first place of any interest on the road from Baghdad, for close by are the substantial remains of the palace built by the monarch Khosroe for his beautiful bride Shirin, whose personality is enshrouded in a veil of the wildest romance. The story of the great love of Ferhad for the peerless Shirin, of the colossal works which he undertook as the price of her hand, of his tragic self-destruction on hearing a false tale of her death, is one with which that quaint enigma, the story-teller of Asia, knows full well he can still set a cord trembling through the passionate pulses of the East. One of the buildings still standing is undoubtedly a fire temple, while the remains of a vast

BRIDGE OVER THE DIALA.

aqueduct, "and of troughs and stone pipes by which water was brought into the palace and city from a distance of fifteen miles, are still traceable among the desolations."[1] This was said to have been one of the works of Ferhad for Shirin. Excavation might be well repaid here, for I heard of a native having dug up a small gold statue ten or twelve years ago. It is perhaps needless to add that local officialdom found it incumbent on it to take charge of the said golden statuette!

Beyond these relics of the past I found another monument of an entirely different description and of quite recent construction, having been erected, in fact, only a few weeks before. This consists of a small oval-shaped building of brick and plaster, which is of no particular attraction of itself, and might even pass unnoticed by a casual observer. There is, however, a tale attached, a tale which was related to me in gruesome detail, which lost nothing in the telling by an eye-witness of the scene. For the odd oval-shaped building, which assumed a ghastly significance as the horrid details were poured forth, was nothing less than a cruel shroud wound slowly round a living criminal, while death still held aloof, mocking his victim with the unspeakable horror of his slow approach. Incredible though it may seem, the appalling custom of walling a man up alive is still practised in the twentieth century! The victim—he had stolen a bale of cotton—was strong, his struggles were fierce, the operation long-drawn-out, and the appreciation of the crowded onlookers great in proportion. The builders found their task no easy one, even though their victim was bound, and the order was finally given to reduce his power of resistance. The

[1] I quote Mrs Bishop here, because I did not observe the "troughs and stone pipes" myself. See her 'Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan.'

only weapon handy was a blunt butcher's knife, the executioner was intoxicated, and the ghastly terror of that final scene beyond belief. Let me not dwell upon the revolting details. Suffice it that the monument is there—a timely warning to all would-be malefactors.

Within a dozen miles of Kasr-i-Shirin an experimental shaft was being sunk in search of oil. When one thinks of the forest of *derricks* and feverish activity of Baku, the single shed and engine here seems a small affair. Nevertheless, it may be the beginning of an important business. That oil exists in many parts of Southern Persia is well known, and it is a matter for congratulation that a concession of such vast possibilities has fallen into British hands. The concession obtained from the Shah by Mr Darcy is for sixty years, dating from 1902, and includes the whole of the south of Persia. I rode out one morning,—passing on the way the village of Azziz Khan, a monster of iniquity who had lately shot his own nephew under circumstances of the greatest treachery, and farther on a group of villages, all in process of reconstruction after being burnt in a recent inter-tribal engagement,—and spent a day at the hospitable camp of the engineer in charge. Oil had not then been struck,—the borer reached a depth of 800 feet the morning I was there,—though all the indications of its presence were observed.[1] Galatian mechanics were at the head of gangs of Persian drillers from Baku, while the natives were being made use of as far as their incapacity for skilled labour would allow, in order to comply with the provision of the concession which demands the employment of Persian subjects.

[1] Early in the present year (1904) one of the borings began to spout, and oil was sent to England as a sample. The presence of oil in satisfactory quantity having thus been proved, exploration was embarked upon farther south, and additional progress may no doubt shortly be looked for.

If it may be permitted to one who has no expert knowledge to make a criticism, it is that the site selected does not appear to be a particularly happy one to have chosen for a trial shaft. To begin with, it is unpleasantly close to an extremely nebulous Turko-Persian border, at a point where the promoters of the Baghdad railway have mineral rights for a distance of 20 kilometres on either side of their line. But even supposing there is no possibility of future friction on these grounds, how is the oil, when it is found, to be conveyed to the coast? The only transport is that of animals until Baghdad is reached, and if, as is suggested, a pipe be laid, it will have to pass through 500 miles of extremely mountainous country, a costly undertaking in itself, which will be rendered infinitely more so by the necessity which will inevitably arise of bribing the various predatory tribes through whose dominions it must pass. If, as is said, the oil-field extends for 300 miles and touches Shushter and Dizful, it is natural to wonder why a trial venture was not made there—the oil found at Shushter is so pure that it is used by the natives without refining—since the excellent port of Mohammerah is within such easy reach. It is to be supposed, however, that those whose business it is know best, and the enterprise is in any case one which every Englishman will wish a hearty success.

In looking over my notes on Kasr-i-Shirin I find it put down that I attended a dinner-party there. There is nothing very remarkable about going to a dinner-party in an ordinary way, but this one was something out of the common. Mine host was a Kurdish chief, Shir Khan by name, and governor of the district. He it was under whose superintendence the immuration already mentioned took place. Out of courtesy to me we dined at a table, a concession which I appreciated

all the more when he informed my interpreter confidentially that he found the position—*i.e.*, seated on a chair—insufferably uncomfortable. After imbibing innumerable cups of tea and coffee between 6 P.M. and 8 P.M., a cloth was laid, and large flat slabs of bread spread all round, a space being left in the centre for dishes. Bowls of *pilao* and dishes of mutton were then placed in the middle, and when we had each been given a plate, spatchcocked fowls were brought in on skewers, pulled off, and placed on the table in front of us. Knives and forks were conspicuous by their absence, but at the invitation of our host to set to, a dozen hands were plunged into the rice—rather a greasy performance, since it was cooked in butter—and dismembered the fowls which lay scattered about on the table. We went ahead merrily, stuffing handfuls of meat and rice into our mouths until hunger was appeased and thirst satisfied with the goats' milk which formed the staple drink, when a servant came round and poured water over our hands from a brazen ewer. That brought the meal to an end. Simple but effective was my reflection after it was finished. Personally I felt that I was clumsy, from being unused to eating everything with my fingers, I suppose; but for those accustomed to it, it appears possible to dispose of a maximum of food in a minimum of time—if I may judge by the performances of my fellow-guests, at least!

After leaving Kasr-i-Shirin the track, which is abominably stony, passes through the filthy little village of Sar-i-Pul, identified with the Halah of 2 Kings xvii. 6, up a broad valley for a short distance, through a natural cleft in an abrupt limestone ridge, said to contain the tomb of David, and along another valley, at the extremity of which rise the perpendicular

walls of rock which constitute the historic Zagros Gates. The ascent is made by a road which zigzags backwards and forwards up the steep mountain-side, and before reaching the summit a marble arch is passed on the left-hand side, connected in the popular mind with the story of Ferhad and Shirin, but said by Layard to be Greek or Roman.[1]

Having reached the summit you find that you have risen by one gigantic step, as it were, from the lowlands of Chaldæa to the highlands of Kurdistan, and I also found that I had been incontinently hurried from the delightful warmth and sunshine of early spring into the gloomy depths of an abnormally late winter. For the next four days we ploughed laboriously through a sea of mud and slush underfoot, while rain, wind, hail, and snow raged without ceasing overhead. It was consequently with feelings of intense satisfaction that I marched into Kermanshah on the 11th March, to be welcomed and hospitably entertained by Mr H. Rabino, whom I found in charge of the Kermanshah branch of the Imperial Bank of Persia, opened here just a year before.

Varahan IV., at one time Governor of Kerman, and hence styled Kerman Shah, had an eye to the strategic advantages of the site when he chose the position now occupied by the town which bears his name. Situated midway between Teherân, Tabriz, Ispahân, and Baghdad, with highways from all of these places meeting at a common centre, its importance as a strategic position is assured. Being the first town encountered on the Baghdad-Teherân trade route, all goods must necessarily enter it before they are distributed to the various towns

[1] "At about two-thirds of the ascent there is a small square building of large dressed blocks of white marble, consisting of a deep-vaulted recess, which is Greek or Roman."—Early Adventures, vol. i. p. 220.

to which they are destined, hence its additional importance as a commercial centre. The usual discrepancy is of course found in the various estimates of its population. The province of which it is the capital, and which bears the same name, is said to have a total population of from 300,000 to 350,000, and the town itself is probably responsible for about 50,000. In Lord Curzon's 'Persia' it is put at 20,000, while Mrs Bishop, writing about the same time, gives 25,000. The information from the three different sources from which I sought to ascertain the approximate figure was of doubtful value, as may be judged by the results: (1) 100,000 (Turkish Consul); (2) 60,000 (Mr H. Rabino); (3) 40,000-50,000 (Baron Weydel, chief of the customs of Western Persia). The bazaars are fairly large and well stocked with goods from Europe, though of the whole bulk of the trade which passes through only a small proportion remains in the city.

At one end of the town is an open space known as the gun square, planted with trees, some of which could tell unpleasant tales. Two poplars growing close together immediately outside the bank premises had played the part of an extemporary scaffold three years before. The criminal, suspended upside-down, with one leg fastened to each tree trunk, was slowly cut open with a pair of scissors! This was in the days of the Ala-ed-Dowleh, since promoted to the governorship of Farz, who must be of similar stamp to the genial governor of Arabistan, who, on hearing that the British Minister had lost some saddles in his district, hastened to assure him that there was no cause for annoyance, since in the event of the saddles not being immediately restored, the skins of the villagers would make excellent substitutes! I was only in the town a few days, but felt I was lucky not to witness

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any atrocity. My host, while reposing on his balcony, had witnessed a man deprived of his ears and nose and then led round the bazaar as a beauty show only a short time before.

The town is the seat of a royal governor, a fact of which I was constantly reminded, for my room was immediately under the *nakarreh khaneh*, or drum-tower, and every evening at sunset my ears were deafened by a wild fanfaronade, while

> "For leagues and leagues around,
> The brazen sound
> Rolled through the stillness of departing day,
> Like thunder far away."[1]

To leave Kermanshah without saying something about the famous rock-sculptures of Bostan would be as unnatural as to leave Moscow without seeing the Kremlin. Four miles from the city rises the perpendicular rock face in which are hewn the arched recesses known as the Tak-i-Bostan. Writers have laboured to show that the name is Tak-i-Bostan or arch of the garden; but I believe this conclusion, though ingenious, is wrong, and that the place is not necessarily named after the gardens in the vicinity, but is in reality Tak-i-Vastam, which is the reading found in the Persian manuscripts. Immediately in front of the rock are two tanks of water surrounded by trees, and to the right as you face it an ingeniously constructed villa, the property of the late Vekil-i-Dowleh, who held the office of British agent. The largest and most modern of the two arches—the third set of sculptures consists of a panel and is not surmounted by an arch—has a height of 30 feet, and a breadth and depth of 24 and 22 feet respectively. On the right-hand side there is

[1] Robert Southey.

a large panel representing a stag-hunt, while a corresponding scene on the left represents a boar-hunt. The back is occupied by two panels, one above the other, the upper showing Khosroe Parviz (590-628 A.D.) in the centre, with Shirin and the Emperor Mauritius on either hand. This is the generally accepted theory, though it must also be said that there is another which assigns a mythical character to all three figures. The lower panel is occupied by a gigantic figure of Khosroe Parviz on horseback. The second arch, 17 feet high, 19 feet wide, and 11 feet deep, contains a panel on which are sculptured the figures of Shapur II. (310-379 A.D.) and Shapur III. (385-390 A.D.), with inscriptions in Pehlevi on either side which leave no room for ingenious conjecture. Here it is set down unmistakably who the figures are, the inscription on the left reading: "Image of the worshipper of Mazda, the king Shapur, king of kings, of Iran and Aniran, whose origin is from the gods, the son of the worshipper of Mazda, the king Shapur, king of kings, of Iran and Aniran, whose origin is from the gods, the grandson of the king Horamazda, king of kings"—and that on the right: "This is the image of the worshipper of Mazda, the king Shapur, king of kings, of Iran and Aniran, whose origin is from the gods, the son of the worshipper of Mazda, the king Horamazda, king of kings, of Iran and Aniran, whose origin is from the gods, the grandson of Narcis, king of kings."

The third set of sculptures on the right is the most ancient of the three, and represents Shapur I. (241-273 A.D.) being invested with half the kingdom by Ardeshir, founder of the Sassanian dynasty (211-241 A.D.) At one side of the panel is a representation of the god Ormuz, while a figure lying prostrate beneath Shapur and Ardeshir is variously described as Artabanus, the

last of the Parthian monarchs, and the Emperor Valerian.

The carving in the largest of the arches is excellent, and in many parts well preserved; but the whole effect is marred, firstly, by a painted sculpture of one Mohammed Ali Mirza, Dowlet Shah (son of Fath Ali Shah), sitting in a golden chair, with his son Heshmet-ed-Dowleh in front, and another son, Emad-ed-Dowleh, behind, which his chief eunuch, Agha Ghani, caused to be executed above the boar-hunt; and, secondly, by an extraordinary vulgarity which has led innumerable travellers to inscribe their own unimportant names all over the place. It is absolutely nauseating, while looking at the excellent carving in the panel representing the stag-hunt, to find your eye suddenly arrested by the name Polacco chiselled deep in large letters in the very middle of the scene! One wonders whether Mr Polacco really is under the illusion that his name is of such vast interest to posterity that it must be inscribed among the finest rock-sculptures extant in Persia! Among other names I remember Williams and Barker; but these, it must be admitted, are but specimens of an enormous number of similar disfigurements. The late Nasr-ed-Din Shah was much disgusted with the works of these vandals, as is attested by the following passages culled from his Majesty's diary of his expedition to Kerbela, 1870-1871: "Above this panel Agha Ghani, a native of Talish, Gilan, chief eunuch of Mohammed Ali Mirza, took the trouble of having an image of the late prince sitting on a throne, and that of Heshmet-ed-Dowleh, his son, and that of another of his younger sons, sculptured on the stone. Ghani himself, with his despiseable face, is standing in front of the prince. It is so badly and coarsely done that he has really spoiled the arch. It was so badly sculptured

that they had to paint it with various colours. Really it has spoiled the arch." There is likewise something pathetic in the plaint which occurs farther on: "The inscriptions of people on the rock here have not left a single place free."

Two carved stone capitals, or possibly fire-altars, and the upper portion of an enormous stone figure, have been set up on the far side of one of the tanks. I have seen it suggested that this figure fell from a platform above the arches, where stone stumps supposed to be the feet are still visible. I think this is quite out of the question, since the stone stumps, to begin with, are of an absolutely different coloured stone to the statue, and bear no resemblance to feet. They were probably used to secure the scaffolding at the time the sculptures were executed. The statue has been invested with a certain magic power by the hill tribes, who regard it as a sort of panacea for every ill. To quote his Majesty's diary once more: "It is said that the Lur has this statue in veneration, and when they suffer from chills, fever, and other ailments they place at the foot of the statue peas and raisins and other offerings. Most of the time they go away unhappy. They are foolish and stupid men."

To the right of the sculptures are two small flights of steps cut out of the rock, which lead on to a sort of platform above. Before leaving let me correct the impression which I received when I read of them as a "flight of several hundreds of steps"! Niches would be a more correct term, and the two short flights are jointly possessed of precisely 102. A far more accurate idea is gained from the remark of his late Majesty: "But to go up these steps is not free of danger!"

CHAPTER X.

KERMANSHAH TO TEHERÂN.

Remains at Kangavar—The inscriptions at Bisitun—Deciphered by Sir H. Rawlinson—Description of the tablet above the inscriptions—Ker Porter's surmise—Names and identities—Another inscription—The country between Kermanshah and Hamadan—Hamadan—Population—Trade—The tombs of Esther and Mordecai—The tomb of Avicenna—A beautiful mosque—The *Ganjnameh*—A stone lion—The key to the decipherment of the cuneiform alphabet—Gold—The question of the site of Ecbatana of Deioces—The debauches of Alexander the Great—The decay of Hamadan—The country between Hamadan and Teherân—Execrable weather—Discomforts of travel—Reach Teherân.

BETWEEN Kermanshah and Hamadan, the next town of importance, there is a good deal of interest. At Kangavar, three days' journey along the road, I noticed many remains of ancient buildings, huge square-cut stones, and in one place portions of colossal round pillars built into a modern mud building, probably portions of the temple to Artemis, which is supposed to have stood here.[1] But all else is overshadowed in importance by the world-famed inscriptions of Darius, which stand graven in three languages upon a sheer and inaccessible rock-face of the mountain Piru. Im-

[1] See Layard's 'Early Adventures': "Kangowar is supposed to represent the ancient city of Pancobar, where the Assyrian queen (Semiramis) is said to have erected a temple to Anaïtis or Artemis, and to have established an erotic cult in which, if her reputation be not belied, she was amongst the most ardent worshippers."—Vol. i. p. 246.

mediately below is situated the squalid village of Bisitun or Behistun, and so sheer and to such a height does the rock cliff rise above it, that it is almost with a shock that one looks out on waking in the morning to see so stupendous a mass seemingly overhanging one.

The inscriptions, which were first deciphered by Sir H. Rawlinson, and record the achievements of Darius's reign, are at a height of about 300 feet from the ground. I climbed up to within about 30 yards, but beyond this found it impossible to proceed without aid. Above the inscriptions, which occupy a space of 150 feet in length by 100 feet in height, is a sculptured panel of fourteen figures. On the left are two figures standing, then one seated, shown by his superior size to be Darius himself, and then nine figures standing, chained to one another. These latter represent the impostors who led the different revolts in Susiana, Babylon, Media, Sagartia, and Margiana. The last figure, distinguished from the rest, who are bareheaded, by a high cap, is the leader of a Scythian revolt conquered by Darius, while the sculptures were in progress of construction. Underneath the foot of Darius is the prostrate figure of Pseudo-Smerdis, the Magian usurper, and hovering over all is a representation of the god Auramazda. In Ker Porter's description of Bisitun I find the following: "Should the discoveries of time prove my conjecture to be right, this bas-relief must be nearly two hundred years older than any which are ascribed to Cyrus at Persepolis or Parsargadæ." But the discoveries of time have failed him, for his conjecture was that the central figure was Shalmanezer, and the rest the captive tribes of Israel! And the elaborate reasoning which he gives in support of his theory falls to the ground in the light of ascertained fact.

When one examines the whole carefully with a glass, one realises what a wonderful work it is. The labour which must have been spent, first in rendering so large a space absolutely smooth, and then in engraving the gigantic inscription in Persian, Susian, and Assyrian on the hard surface of the rock, must have been enormous. A coating of some sort of varnish seems to have been placed over the whole, which is doubtless responsible for the extraordinary state of preservation of the writing to this day. After seeing this strange writing on the rock and learning the great story which it tells, it is easy to agree with the remark of Lord Curzon that here stands "the most important historical document, albeit in stone, next to the Damietta stone, that has been discovered and deciphered" in the past century.[1]

A good deal of perplexity has arisen over the question of names and identities. Bisitun is said to mean "without pillars," and has also been supposed to be a contraction of the ancient Bagistan. I may mention that eight or nine miles to the south I noticed remains of stone pillars and capitals at a village called Hadgiabad, which might well mark the site of Bagistan of the ancients, since the distance of Hadgiabad from Bisitun agrees with the distance given by ancient writers of Bagistan from the inscriptions.

To the right altogether of the famous inscriptions is another tablet containing some rude and hardly recognisable equestrian figures, with an inscription declaring it to be the work of Gotarzes, the Parthian king (about 50 A.D.); and in the centre of this a space has been smoothed at a later date, and an Arabic inscription inserted, setting forth the terms on which the revenue of the two villages has been assigned to the upkeep of the caravanserai. If one may judge by the state of

[1] Persia, vol. i. p. 52.

preservation of the said caravanserai, the revenue of the two villages must be microscopic! Yet one more relic is to be seen in the centre of the village in the form of a carved stone capital, or perhaps fire-altar, similar to those already mentioned at Kermanshah.

Little more need be said of the journey from Kermanshah to Hamadan. It takes you through an elevated country, along wild valleys and across rugged ridges, where the climate even at this time of the year is apt to be cold and stormy.[1] Five days, or six if you are content with moderate marches, will take you from one town to the other, the distance, given by the muleteers as twenty-six farsakhs, being roughly equivalent to rather more than 100 miles. I reached Hamadan on the 19th March, to find the surrounding country under snow and the town itself a quagmire of filth and slush, and I entered into the feelings of Ker Porter, who, though not expecting "to see Ecbatana as Alexander found it; neither in the superb ruin in which Timur had left it," has yet put on record that when he did actually behold it, "it was with the appalled shock of seeing a prostrate dead body"!

The population is variously computed at from 40,000 to 80,000, but my host, an Armenian gentleman whose hospitality and kindness I shall long remember, affirmed that it was not less than 50,000. In 'Persia' Lord Curzon gives it as "not more than 20,000," but he must have been misinformed, for there has certainly not been an increase of 30,000 in the last decade. There is a colony of from 3000 to 4000 Jews, and about 50 families of Armenians.

[1] I notice that Layard, travelling here in 1840, found snow on the summits in July. "We were now approaching the loftiest part of the great range of the Luristan Mountains, and the highest peaks were still covered with snow."—Early Adventures.

The bazaars are busy and fairly spacious, presenting the long covered-in arcades with their many ramifications, familiar to the traveller in the East. Great impetus was given to the trade of the town by the stifling of the transit trade through Caucasia, which has resulted in much of the trade which formerly went to Tabriz now reaching Hamadan *viâ* Baghdad. I walked through the greater part of the bazaars, where I found Manchester prints and cottons everywhere displayed, Russia supplying only about 10 per cent of such goods at the present time (1903). With regard to other goods, however, Russia supplies the lion's share. Glass ware, crockery, cutlery, &c., all come from her, while whereas fifteen years ago Russian sugar was unknown in Hamadan, 80 per cent now bears her trade-mark. I did not see a single package of Marseilles sugar in the bazaar. The chief article of local manufacture is leather, while wine is made from the grapes which grow abundantly all round, and has a considerable local reputation. With praiseworthy perseverance, but quite gratuitously, more than one writer has persisted in extolling the excellence and widespread reputation of the copper ware of Hamadan. As a matter of fact there is no copper work in Hamadan, or at any rate no more than there is in any other Persian town. The only copper-ware repositories that I saw were one or two shops in a small side bazaar, whose copper goods admittedly all came from Kashan.

The chief objects of interest in the town are the tombs of Esther and Mordecai, and of Avicenna (Abu ibn Sena), and a beautiful little mosque of Seljuk origin; and through a snowstorm and the appalling filth of the narrow streets I ploughed my

way to see them. I was asked if I did not find them—the streets—the worst I had ever seen, but felt obliged to reply that between streets of the unredeemed Orient I found it difficult to discriminate. It is sufficiently obvious that no great degree of cleanliness can be postulated for any street that, in addition to its own duties, has to fulfil the office of main sewer! And in no part of Persia that I have visited have I found any indication that the *Dea Cloacina* finds any place in the national hierarchy.

The tombs of the Jewish queen and her uncle are in a small building close to the Musjid-i-Jama. Entering by a low stone door about four feet high, one finds oneself in an ante-chamber, from which a still smaller door, through which one can just squeeze, gives access to the sacred chamber. Here in the centre, beneath a domed roof, stand two sarcophagi, each made in three parts, one standing on the top of the other, of some dark hardwood, carved all over with inscriptions in Hebrew. In each case the top and smaller part seem to have been removed at the time of the Afghan invasion, and restored at a later date. I have seen it written that the remains of the deceased repose in these sarcophagi, but this is incorrect, and the information of the Jewish custodian, to the effect that they were never placed in them, is corroborated by the epitaph on that of Mordecai: "Those whose bodies are now *beneath in this earth*, when animated by Thy mercy, were great." The italics are mine. Beneath the floor of the chamber is a vault, and it is beneath this vault that the corpses are supposed to lie. I was further informed that a lamp was kept continually burning. Being an inquisitive

Briton, I asked to be shown the vault, and after a stone in the floor had been raised, I peered down into a sepulchral chamber to see a lamp indeed, but a lamp in which, *mirabile dictu*, there flickered no ray from the sacred flame! I suggested that the fire should at once be restored, a suggestion which the aged custodian agreed must immediately be acted upon. At one side of the central chamber is a small chancel, recently decorated, beneath which are said to repose the bones of a Jewish doctor of some fame, and beneath which is likewise said to be a deep well into which at one time the bones of deceased Jews were cast.

The other tomb of interest, that of Avicenna, is situated in another part of the town, and is marked by a small monument of stone, on which is carved the name of the man in Turkish, while another rather larger tombstone stands beside it in the same small domed chamber. The 'Encyclopædia Britannica' gives utterance to the following extraordinary statement: "He [Avicenna] died in June 1037, in his 58th year, and was buried among the palm-trees by the Kiblah of Hamadan." It is conceivable that there may have been palm-trees at Hamadan in the days of Avicenna, though if there were they must have passed away very soon after the famous physician; but how a man can be buried by the *Kiblah* of Hamadan is a puzzle which I admit I am unable to solve, the *Kiblah* meaning simply the direction of Mecca.

The mosque which I have mentioned as the other object of interest is now roofless. It has a brickwork inscription in Kufic round the outside, and the walls inside are covered with most beautiful stucco-work in gypsum. The design is intricate and involved, but seems to be largely floral, much of the ornamentation

being of the kind known as honeycomb. Beneath the floor is an underground chamber in which are several tombs. There was at one time a legend that from this chamber there was an underground passage to Mecca, but a member of the usual crowd which invariably collects round any European who happens to stop to inspect anything, taking pity, I suppose, on my credulity, assured me that this was not the case!

Beyond these objects of interest there are two tablets with trilingual inscriptions known as *Ganj-nameh*, bearing the names and titles of Darius and Xerxes; nor must I forget to mention an ancient stone lion which stands near the *Musallah*, a mound on the outskirts of the town, and is said to have been set up by Belinas, a magician, as a talisman against cold, from which the city suffers severely. I was unable to visit the Ganjnameh myself, since, being situated high up on the side of Mount Elvend, it was deep under snow; but according to the accounts of others there are two square excavations in the face of an enormous block of red granite, cut to the depth of a foot, about 5 feet in breadth and much the same in height, each tablet containing three columns of engraved arrow-headed writing—a description which agrees with a photograph which I have in my possession.

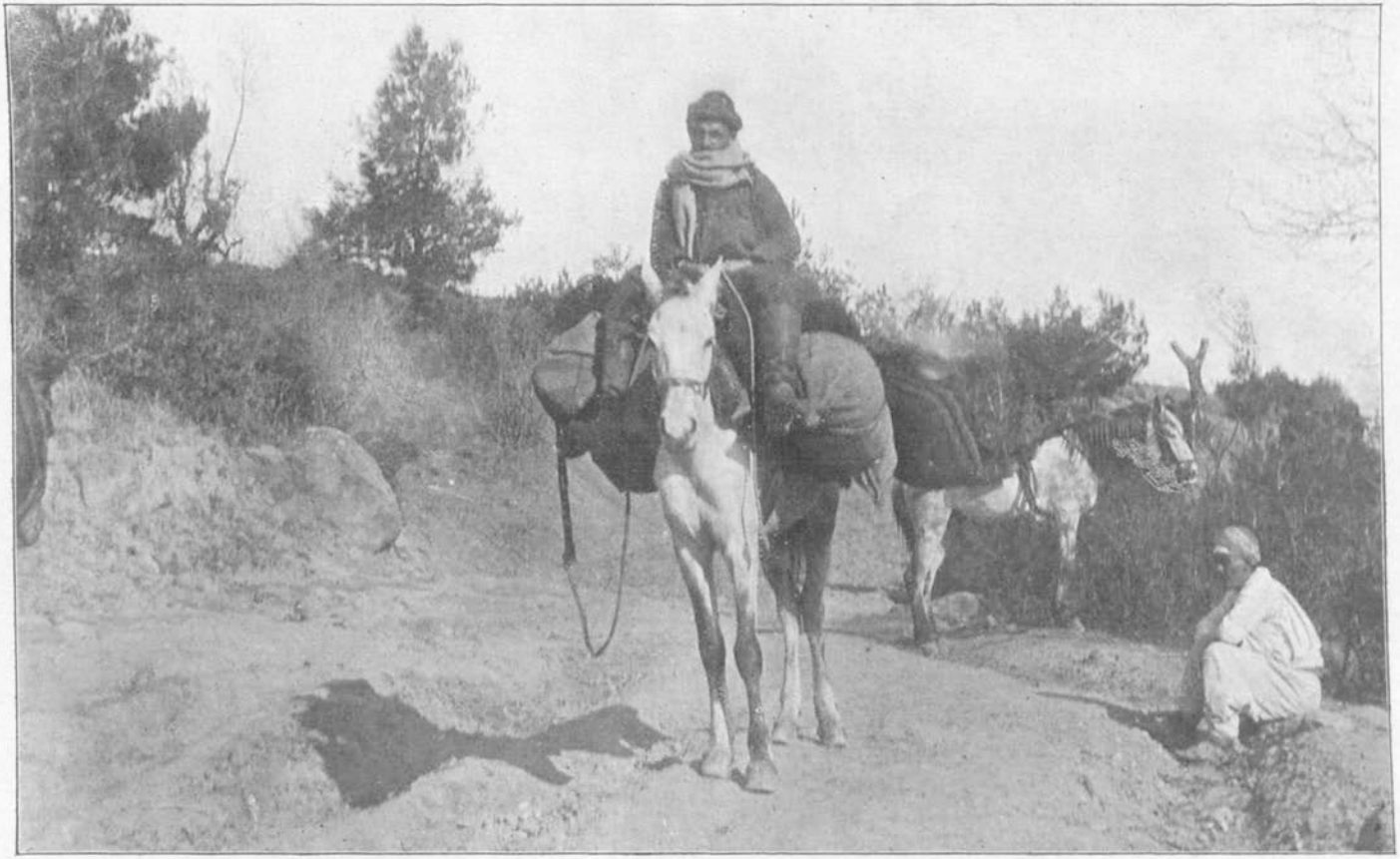
Layard describes them as being of special interest, as having first afforded the key to the decipherment of the cuneiform writing; but in this he is incorrect. The first clue was given by the inscriptions of Persepolis, accurate drawings of which were made by Niebuhr in 1765, and the first man to discover a method by which the inscriptions might be deciphered was the German Grotefend, who presented a paper upon the subject to the Göttingen Academy in 1802. By comparing the inscriptions copied by Niebuhr, he deciphered the names

of Hystaspes, Darius, and Xerxes. In 1835, after correct values had been obtained for rather more than a third of the Persian alphabet, as a result of the work of Grotefend and his successors, Sir Henry Rawlinson, who was ignorant of the details of Grotefend's discovery, set to work on the inscriptions of Hamadan. Thanks to his knowledge of Zend and Pehlevi, cognate dialects to the old Persian language, he was rewarded with a greater measure of success than had fallen to his predecessors in the same field, and after working for two years at the inscriptions of Behistun, he forwarded in the year 1837 a translation of the first two paragraphs to the Royal Asiatic Society, to be followed ten years later by the publication of a complete translation of the Persian text of the now celebrated inscriptions to which I have already referred.

The land all round the town is frequently washed for gold, which is now found chiefly in the form of gold-dust. Gold ear-rings and ornaments have also come to light in the process, and some of the older inhabitants have found bowls containing coins when digging at the foundations of their houses, relics no doubt of the days when the Ecbatana of the Achæmenian kings stood here. A question still to solve is whether the Ecbatana of Deioces the Mede, with its seven brilliantly coloured circular walls, stood where Hamadan stands now, in spite of a reckless statement by Layard that "Hamadan is known to occupy the site of Ecbatana, the ancient capital of the Medes." Whether this be so or not, it is at any rate agreed that here stood the treasure city of the Achæmenian kings, and it is likewise certain that here Alexander indulged in the most riotous living on his return from his conquests in the East. In the midst of the wildest scenes of feasting and debauchery Hephæstion, his favourite general, died. The results of the

king's anger and grief at this misfortune were terrible. To quote the much-travelled baronet once more, "He did not shed tears but blood!" Orders were given that the physician who had allowed his beloved Hephæstion to die should be crucified: all merriment was brought to an end, and "that the groans and anguish of multitudes might accompany his own, he sallied forth at the head of a part of his army, attacked a defenceless neighbouring district, and put all the inhabitants to the sword: this he called sacrificing to Hephæstion's ghost!" In later days Hamadan suffered the usual fate of cities which happened to lie in the path of Timur, and, as though this was not enough, Agha Mohammed swept down upon it to complete the devastation. As one gazes upon the modern town one feels that it has indeed experienced a blow from which it has never recovered, and one may even be excused for indorsing the saying that "Hamadan is the most hateful of towns; its children are old men for ugliness, and its old men are children for silliness," though it may strike one as invidious that such a description should be applied to Hamadan in preference to any other Persian town.

From Hamadan the track lies across a succession of hills and elevated valleys, which broaden out finally into the level dust-coloured plains of Central Persia. The weather the whole way was execrable—an almost continual blizzard for the first seven days—and the lateness of the winter was spoken of on all sides as unusual. At Teherân itself snow lay on the ground so late as the last week in March, and the villagers all round were bewailing the rapidity with which their mud-houses were returning to their primary element. One day it took us three hours to accomplish four miles in a driving snowstorm, while underfoot the mud and slush were



THE HARD-WORKED BAGGAGE PONY.

almost up to the mules' bellies. The consequence was they were perpetually falling down, having to be unloaded, picked up again, and reloaded, while we were in imminent peril of frost-bite. On another occasion, after braving a galling wind from the north all day, we reached a small village where I found a room with fireplace and chimney that did not smoke—a great luxury. The huge wood-fire which I kept burning was, however, of little avail, and the thermometer could by no means be induced to rise above 30° Fahr. all night. There were no windows, but this defect was made up for by the door, which when closed did not reach the wall on one side by several inches, leaving a gap through which the wind shrieked a high-pitched threnody. These are the occasions on which one ponders somewhat regretfully on the discarded comforts of civilisation, which appear possessed of attractions unsuspected until now. Teherân, however, lay before me, and on the last day of March, thirty-three days after setting out from Baghdad, I rode into the capital of the Shah.

CHAPTER XI.

TEHERÂN.

Recent improvements at Teherân—The city gates—Days of mourning—Interview with the Shah and with the Prime Minister—A visit to the palace—A motley collection!—The picture-gallery—An extraordinary ceremony—Religious plays—Nature of the country round the capital.

TEHERÂN has been so often and so conscientiously described that to give any detailed account of it to-day would be a quite superfluous waste of time. With the exception of the erection of a large barracks for the Persian Cossacks, which extend the length of one side of a spacious parade-ground, and a considerable increase of buildings in the European quarter of the town, it would seem that little change has taken place since the late Shah, Nasr-ed-Din, bethinking him suddenly that "the 'Point of Adoration of the Universe' was framed in a somewhat inadequate setting," bade his capital to "burst its bonds and enlarge its quarters."[1] There is no immediate fear of the city outgrowing the walls which were then erected, and on the eastern side of the town I noticed quite a large area in the vicinity of the Meshed gate under cultivation! The city gates, of which there are a considerable number at intervals in the walls, are one of the features of the town, being ornamented with designs in

[1] Persia. Curzon.

modern Persian tile-work, but the care with which they are closed and barred at night strikes one as being a wholly unnecessary precaution, since there is absolutely nothing to prevent any one from walking across the dry ditch and mud walls—ramparts would be a more correct designation—should he feel so inclined; indeed, I am assured that in places there is no difficulty in crossing them on horseback.

Those in high places seemed generally exhausted—especially the Treasury—after the trip to Europe, and the fact that I arrived at the beginning of the *Ashura*, the first ten days of religious mourning of the *Moharrem*, was responsible for the unwonted quiet which brooded over the society of the capital. Under these circumstances I appreciated all the more the kindness which prompted both the Shah and the prime minister to do me the honour of inviting me to an interview. The appearance of Mozuffer a Din Shah is now familiar to the English public. On the occasion of my visit he wore a plain dark uniform with jewelled sword, and the national crest in diamonds on the ordinary black sheepskin *kolah*, and spoke at first in Persian through an interpreter and then in French when he broached the congenial topic of sport. As is his custom, he received me standing, in the centre of a small room profusely ornamented with the cut-mirror work known as *aineh kari*, at one end of which stands the celebrated jewel globe,[1] while a few Court officials stood grouped at a short distance.

On another occasion I was shown the principal halls and chambers of the palace, which contain so extra-

[1] See Lord Curzon's Persia, vol. i. p. 314: "Upon a separate stand appears the globe of jewels, which was constructed out of his loose stones by the reigning Shah (Nasr-ed-Din) at a cost (exclusive of the gems provided by himself) of £320,000. The alleged value, with the stones (75 lb. of pure gold, and 51,366 gems, weighing 3656·4 grammes), is £947,000."

ordinary a collection of objects, ranging from jewellery and china of enormous value to oleographs, tooth-brushes, and toys! The greater number of objects of real value have been removed to the inner chambers of the palace, which are, of course, sacred from the stranger's gaze; but the so-called peacock throne, which has been so ruthlessly torn from its high estate by the practical author of 'Persia,' stands at one end of the great hall, which is a perfect museum for a heterogeneous collection of the products of the West. Its appearance is perhaps rather barbaric than beautiful, the great mass of badly cut gems, indifferently set in plated gold, giving a somewhat garish effect. A picture-gallery is situated in another part of the palace, which is as replete with eccentricities as it is with pictures. Side by side with really excellent oil-paintings I observed an advertisement of Brook's cotton, while a little farther along were two cards covered with samples of fish-hooks, and yet again was to be seen a Madonna rubbing shoulders with doubtful illustrations from a French comic paper! There was one landscape which puzzled me for a long time, until it at length dawned upon me that it was hung upside-down! The picture itself was perhaps responsible for this slight error, and I admit that I have seen daubs to which such a mishap might excusably occur in other countries besides Persia, though it is not usual to hang them in the courts of royalty or the palaces of kings.

If, as I have already suggested, the month of Moharrem is a quiet one at the Persian capital, it is nevertheless one which affords the stranger an opportunity of witnessing a spectacle which he would look for in vain in any other country or even here at any other time of the year. For on the last of the ten days during which the Persians mourn the death of

their two prophets, Hassan and Hussein, their grief culminates in the ceremony of the *katl* or murder. A large number of people of the lower classes robe themselves in white, and then, linked arm in arm and carrying huge knives, parade the streets calling on the names of their prophets, while, urged on by the stirring strains of bands of music, they cut and gash themselves horribly about the head and face. I watched these weird processions for long from a house-roof, while the bands played and the cry "Hassan! Hussein!" rent the air, and the blood flowed till the white robes of the maddened fanatics were dyed crimson from head to foot.

It was a nauseating scene in spite of its novelty, and afforded a graphic illustration of the heights to which fanaticism may rise, recalling inevitably the old-world custom of the prophets of Baal, who "cried aloud, and cut themselves, after their manner, with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them."[1]

Mourning is also observed by the performance of religious plays known as *tazziehs*, to one of which I was invited. I found it a little difficult to see, as I was placed behind a thick perforated curtain, on account, I believe, of the presence of the royal hareem. The play must have been of a very touching nature, judging from the loud wailing and moaning to which the onlookers gave vent; but the pathos was quite spoilt for me when the band suddenly broke into the familiar strains of the "Sourir d'Avril!" This, I imagine, was the result of the recent trip to Europe, and I have no doubt it was considered to be an excellent funeral march!

Beyond the city walls the country is bare, brown,

[1] 1 Kings xviii. 28.

and forbidding, leading one to suppose that the author of the Baluchi proverb, "When God created the world, Baluchistan was made from the refuse," had not travelled as far as the present site of the Persian capital. The insignificant tumuli which are all that remain of the once glorious city of Rhages, while being doubtless of vast interest to the expert, have too little to show to attract the casual traveller; and though the Persian wild goat is to be found in the mountains at no great distance in sufficient numbers to afford excellent sport to the stalker, it is undoubtedly as the headquarters of the incalculable intrigue which passes in Persia for diplomacy, rather than as a city possessed of any material attraction, that Teherân appeals to the visitor. It may be well, therefore, if, before leaving the country, I devote a few words to reviewing the events which formed the chief topics of interest and discussion in the political world at the time of my visit.

CHAPTER XII.

PERSIA IN 1903.

"Tariffs"—Negotiations leading to a revision of the Custom duties—Adverse effects upon British trade over-estimated—Present state of affairs due to British *insouciance* in the past—The treaty of Erzerum—Provisions of the new tariff—Effect upon Indian trade—Great Britain's reply—Events on the Afghan border—The MacMahon mission—Russian intrigue—Ways and communications—The situation in the capital—The fall of the Prime Minister—A tribute to the British Minister.

On March 4, 1903, I entered Persia. On February 14 the new Customs tariff had come into force, and "tariffs" proved to be an unfailing source of conversation from one end of the kingdom to the other. "Tariff reform," in fact, was as undoubtedly the topic of the hour in Persia as it came to be nearer home a very short time after, though discussion of the subject in the two cases was of a widely different nature. For in Persia it was an accomplished fact that had to be digested—the fact that the neutral markets of the world had become the poorer by one.

The advent of a change in the fiscal arrangements of Persia had long been foreshadowed, and when the new commercial treaty between Persia and Turkey was concluded, no obstacle remained to bar the way to such an innovation. It must be admitted, however, that on this occasion the Persians displayed a wholly unex-

pected capacity for holding their tongues pending the negotiations, and the commercial convention which was concluded between Russia and Persia in November 1901 remained a profound secret for more than a year. In December 1902 the ratifications were exchanged, and the British community rudely awakened to the blow which they had sustained. For a blow it undoubtedly was, though—thanks to the Anglo-Persian Convention which was hastily concluded in February 1903—not of the overwhelming nature that those responsible for it had originally hoped and intended.

I have no wish whatsoever to minimise the adverse results to British interests of this the latest Russian diplomatic *coup* at Teherân, for no one can deny that the tariff has been framed more especially against British trade; but while admitting that we are undoubted losers by the Russo-Persian Convention of December 1902, I refuse to attach to it the altogether disproportionate significance that the ultra-pessimists would, from their utterances, appear to do, or to see in this modest triumph of our rivals the presaged collapse of British empire in Asia.

The episode may yet be productive of good if we are only willing to learn by experience and to observe, before a worse thing befall us, the inevitable results of a policy of drift. For it is thanks only to our own want of foresight in the past that British interests lay open to any such attack. At the conclusion of the Anglo-Persian war an article concerning our commercial relations was inserted in the treaty of peace concluded at Paris in 1857, which article read as follows: "The high contracting parties engage that, in the establishment and recognition of Consuls-General, Consuls, Vice-Consuls, and Consular Agents, each shall be placed in the dominions of the other on the footing of the most

favoured nation; and that the treatment of their respective subjects and their trade shall also, in every respect, be placed on the footing of the treatment of the subjects and commerce of the most favoured nation." And the most favoured nation under the treaty of Turkomanchai was Russia, our bitterest rival in the East! Why, it is natural to ask, was no specific agreement come to under the aforesaid treaty of Paris?

If we relied upon Turkey, who, after Russia had agreed to the Customs duties being raised, would, under the treaty of Erzerum, have been the most favoured nation, we relied upon a broken reed; at least, the result proves that if British influence was brought to bear at Constantinople with a view to preserving the treaty of Erzerum, it was not strong enough to prevail against pressure from the North. It is always well to bear in mind when dealing with Turkey that there is still a balance of something like £T24,000,000 owing to Russia on account of indemnity for war! The only other country that might possibly have been put forward as having a commercial treaty with Persia that would hold good was Egypt; but that Egypt, which had been granted the right of concluding commercial treaties with foreign Powers by a firman issued on June 8, 1873, could be looked upon as an independent party to the treaty of Erzerum was evidently not entertained.

So the way was clear, and the tariff was brought in. Its provisions are many and intricate, and any enumeration of the different charges on the various objects of import and export, and the different methods of applying them, would fill many pages, and serve only to weary any one not intimately concerned with the trade of Persia. Imports are divided into no less than forty-two general headings, each one of which is sub-

divided into innumerable minor classifications. The heading *matières textiles*, for instance, includes no less than twenty-six subdivisions, the majority of which require a paragraph of description, and some of which are themselves divided up again into lesser groupings. For a large number of imported articles there is a fixed charge by weight, the recognised unit for this purpose being the *batman* of Tabriz (=640 Persian miskals, 7·27 Russian pounds, 2 French kilogrammes 970 grammes, 6·49 English pounds), while there is a new tariff in place of the old 5 per cent for such goods as are still charged *ad valorem*. Most Manchester goods, such as cottons, calicoes, shirtings, &c., are charged according to weight, the duty working out at from 4 to 10 per cent according to quality. It is obvious that under such a system the more expensive class of goods is greatly favoured, and therein is visible the part that was played by Russian influence in the compilation of the tariff, for it is the more expensive goods that form the bulk of Russian imports. The cheaper goods, which come almost exclusively from Manchester, are of course at a proportionate disadvantage. Again, the duty on sugar, which under a liberal system of bounties floods the Persian market from Russia, works out at about 2¼ per cent, or rather less than half that in vogue in the past, whereas the duty on tea, which comes chiefly from India, has been increased by 95 per cent; spices, another Indian staple, are charged at an exorbitant rate, and the duty of 10 krans per *batman* on indigo is almost prohibitive. One might almost suppose that these figures had been drawn up with the deliberate object of stifling the Nushki-Sistan trade-route, which seems to have become an absolute nightmare to Russian politicians.

The following table of the imports and exports

between Persia and England and Persia and India by the Baghdad-Kermanshah route between January 1902 and January 1903 shows the duty paid according to the old arrangement and the amount that would have had to be paid under the new tariff :—

Articles.	Where from.	Value in krans.	Duty under old tariff.	Duty under new tariff.
	IMPORTS.			
Cotton goods—				
Various	England	20,066,000	993,350	2,041,000
Bleached	"	13,850,000	692,000	
Woollen goods	"	53,200	2,660	4,250
Silk goods	"	107,900	5,300	12,800
Sewing thread, cotton	"	196,000	37,100	66,000
Woollen thread	"	3,200	160	72
Metals—				
Iron and steel bars	"	107,600	5,320	4,600
Tin sheets	"	8,500	420	830
Zinc bars	"	187,500	9,370	6,650
Copper bars	"	321,700	16,400	14,600
Worked iron and steel	"	39,800	1,990	2,520
Tea	India	1,527,700	76,380	638,640
Indigo	"	73,700	3,650	50,000
Spices and pepper	"	1,350,000	68,000	300,000
		37,892,800	1,912,100	3,141,962
	EXPORTS.			
Gum, native	England	2,434,980	121,740	no duty
Grain and seeds	"	1,470	70	160
Wheat	"	164,700	8,450	91,500
Wool, raw	"	40,700	2,050	no duty
Opium	England and Hongkong	2,387,500	119,350	430,300
Carpets	England, America, and Baghdad	1,318,800	65,940	no duty
		6,348,150	317,600	521,960

From the above table it will be seen that the net increase to the Persian Government, on trade valued roughly at £750,000, would have been 1,434,222 krans, or £28,684, of which £15,959 would have been levied on a trade of £700,000 with England, and £12,725 on a trade of £50,000 with India. The comparison is

significant, and shows the extent to which India suffers under the new arrangement.

Such in brief is the new tariff as it exists, and it is fortunate that British diplomacy was successful in extracting a pledge from the Persian Government that it should go no further. For it was common property in Teherân that the tariff of 1903 was put forward tentatively—a thin edge of the wedge—and that ere long further changes were to have been made which could have proved nothing less than disastrous to British trade. The convention which was drawn up and signed by Sir Arthur Hardinge on behalf of Great Britain, and M. Naus on behalf of Persia, February 9, 1903, has at least prevented the evil from spreading, and has locked the stable-door upon what is still left. The duties levied upon British goods, in common with those of other nations, can in the case of Great Britain be raised in the future only with her consent; while in the event of any other country at any time securing advantageous treatment she will be entitled, in virtue of the most favoured nation clause, to claim equal rights.

But Teherân was by no means the only scene of political activity during the opening months of 1903. Away to the east, on the nebulous borders of Afghanistan, the Indian Government were displaying an activity which left no room for doubt as to the part which they considered themselves entitled to play in those parts of Persia which abut upon the outposts of their empire. The boundary defined under such difficulties by the Commission of 1872, under the able direction of Sir F. Goldsmid, which seems to have possessed the distinction of displeasing the Persians only a degree less than it did the Afghans, had ceased to constitute a practical line of division, as was perhaps only to be expected when so unstable a quantity as the river

Helmund formed so important a part of it. So far back as the end of 1900, when I was myself in Sistan, both Afghans and Persians were indulging in hostile incursions into the disputed tracts of the rapidly dissolving border, which led to highly strained relations, if not, indeed, to actual bloodshed; and early in 1903 a Commission under Colonel MacMahon, who had distinguished himself in defining the Afghan-Baluch boundary in 1896, proceeded from India, *viâ* the Helmund, accompanied by an escort and a large number of followers, to meet the Persian Commissioner on the scene of actual dispute.

The susceptibilities of the Russians were of course grievously outraged, and it was whispered that when they found themselves unable to adduce any adequate reason for being represented upon the Commission themselves, the Persian delegate received telegraphic instructions to fall ill, and to summon to his aid a Russian doctor residing at the Russian consulate at Nasratabad! The immediate result was that a deadlock ensued, and the Persian Government, realising that the situation had become absurd, issued instructions for the recovery of their commissioner once more. Like most things in Persia, the operations have proceeded—if indeed such a word may be used—with appropriate dignity and delay; and the summer of 1904 has come round, to find the Commission still biding in Sistan, in thorough enjoyment, no doubt, of the attractions of that place as provided by the inconceivable variety of the insect world which it displays and the distracting persistency of the "wind of 120 days."

In other parts of the kingdom ways and communications seemed to be attracting some attention—not before it was needed, would be an appropriate comment. The difficulties between Messrs Lynch and the Bakhtiari

chiefs, with regard to the payment for the new Ahwaz-Ispahân road, were amicably settled, and a "Persian road company," recently formed in London, gave evidence of an intention to do something on the Teherân-Kum road, some day to be prolonged to Ispahân and Shushter, the concession for which was taken over from the original holders, the directors of the Imperial Bank. In another direction the road question was being taken up by concessionaires from the north, and Russian engineers appeared at Tabriz, in connection presumably with a road from Julfa to Kazvin. Road concessions here include ways from Kazvin as their centre to Teherân, Hamadan, and to Julfa on the frontier, the latter having the prospect of developing at some future time into a railway. In this connection it may be pointed out that a branch line from the Batum-Tiflis-Baku Railway already runs to Erivân, within three days' march of the frontier; and it will be interesting to see, when 1905 comes round, whether the clause in the Russo-Persian Railway agreement, giving the option of a further five years' extension, will be taken advantage of. Be that as it may, there can be little doubt that sooner or later the direct road to Persia will run *viâ* Julfa and Tabriz.

In the capital itself the Chancellor of an exhausted exchequer was trembling at the prospect of having to find the wherewithal for a proposed royal procession to Meshed, with a possible repetition of the European expedition looming like a nightmare in the distance! while the chances of his being able to maintain a hold upon his precarious grasp of office afforded a daily—almost hourly—subject of discussion. The journey to Meshed has so far been staved off, nor does there appear to be any immediate prospect of a return of the

Shah to Europe; nevertheless, the said Prime Minister, the courteous, if ambitious, Atabeg-Azam, who so kindly granted me an audience while at Teherân, has since found it convenient, as it is euphemistically put, to embark upon a prolonged pilgrimage to Mecca! And the 'Ain-ed-Dowleh, formerly governor of Teherân, now reigns in his stead.

It has not been my purpose in the present chapter to portray Persia as a piece, acting in conjunction with other pieces, upon the international chess-board of the East,—that I hope to do in a subsequent chapter. I have merely made mention of such passing events as happened to take place during my visit to the country in the spring of 1903, because such events, however small in themselves, are the factors which combine to determine the direction of any move—even if it be but the move of a pawn—which may subsequently be made. Let me dwell but one moment longer, before leaving the country, to offer praise to whom praise is due for those signs of a recrudescence of British prestige which it was impossible not to observe. If Sir Arthur Hardinge had done no more than to force upon the British Government the necessity of adopting a policy with regard to Persia, he would indeed have deserved well of his country; but I may further add, without, I hope, incurring a charge of impertinence, that all those whose desire it is to see Great Britain assert herself once more in the councils of the East may congratulate themselves on the capable way in which their interests in Persia are at the present time being handled. No one whose lot has cast him among the strange places of the East can fail to have had brought home to him, as never before, the real significance of the phrase, "the heart and fibre

of the British people," or to have learnt, as has been said by a well-known writer, that it is indeed in Asia that one realises best what Great Britain is, and that it is there that one sees "the pick of her sons living the larger and nobler life that men should live."[1]

[1] Mr E. F. Knight.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH THE PORTALS OF PERSIA.

The highroad to Persia—A contrast in scenery—Cost of the *chaussé*—Disadvantages of—The object of Russia—A huge advertisement—What the Persian thinks—Leave Teherân—Persian methods—Teherân to Resht—The silk industry—Obstacles encountered between Resht and Enzeli—A false start—Off at last.

You cannot pass imperceptibly out of Persia into Russia, as you would out of Italy into Switzerland, for instance. She makes her presence undeniably felt right up to the last, and you inevitably miss something when you leave her. Though I had entered Persia twice and left her once, I had never passed through what I suppose may be described as the usual entrance, and I found the journey instructive. The road is Russian, built at enormous cost and so far at considerable loss, but the service is Persian—eminently so.

The most striking feature is the extraordinary change in the scenery as one enters the lower slopes of the mountains of Ghilan. Behind lies the staring sterility with its crude outlines and harsh contours,—"a vast rocky horrid wilderness,"—which, to any one who has seen, and who therefore accepts the rhapsodies of Moore with the indulgence they demand, means Persia. A sudden descent down a precipitous mountain-road, round sharp corners, and along a valley where flows a

mud-coloured torrent, and behold, the sterility is gone! All round vast forests have sprung up, where all the trees of Europe grow in wild profusion. Soft-coloured hills melt away imperceptibly into space, and a filmy blue haze fills in the distance. The undergrowth is tropical in luxuriance, English in its character. Wild-flowers which thrive in the woods and lanes of England crop up in all directions. No Aladdin's lamp or genie's ring could transfer one more effectually from one world to another than do the ragged ponies and decrepit phaetons of the Teherân-Resht post-road.

The road, as I have said, is Russian; but I must admit that it was some time before I in any way realised what it was that Russia expected to gain when she embarked on an undertaking which involved an outlay out of all proportion to any tangible result. Nearly £500,000, three-fourths of which were found by the Russian Government, were expended in the construction of an indifferent carriage-road 225 miles in extent, of which 94 miles, lying over a level plain, were already in existence prior to the advent of Russian enterprise, and can claim to have received but scant attention from the engineer ever since.

As a military highway the road is inadequate, and, in view of the lines of entry from Russia, both on the north-west and on the north-east, superfluous; as an adjunct to the comfort of the traveller or as a means of reducing the time expended on the journey, it is scarcely an unqualified success,—I myself had to spend some time kicking my heels on the road, while wood-cutters were engaged in removing an obstruction in the shape of a large tree,—and as an instrument for assisting trade it can only be looked upon as a failure, since the cost of transport has risen by fully 10 per cent since the road was built.

But the object aimed at—an object, too, which has undoubtedly been achieved—did occur to me at last. The whole concern from beginning to end is a huge advertisement. From the time that you set foot on the road at one end to the time that you leave it at the other, the one word which is incessantly brought before your mind is *Russia*. At every turn there are posts decked out in the colours of Russia. There are toll-bars at which you are confronted with toll-collectors—from Russia. When you drive up to the rest-houses on the road you pass between gate-posts painted with the black-and-white bands which you instantly recognise as identical with the same objects which you meet with on the post-roads in Russia, and it is even said that in the first instance the flag that flew from every suitable point, until the practice was discontinued owing to the awakened susceptibilities of Persia, was the flag of Russia.

And the Persian travelling along the road sees the might of Russia flaunted in the face of Persia, and, seeing it, takes it for granted with Persian indifference. *Kismet*—it is fate; and if anything passes through his mind at all, it is probably the thought that after all he would not be any worse off under any other government, while he might possibly be better. Is it worth the money? Well, that is for Russia to decide, and she appears to think that it is, and when Russia thinks anything worth spending money on, she does not hesitate to spend it. There is no troublesome House of Commons with its still more troublesome Opposition to put spokes in the wheels of autocratic ambition in Russia.

I got into my carriage with a fourgon in tow for the luggage on April 14, and as I was driven at reckless pace down the "Boulevard des Ambassadeurs," through

the gun square and into the slums beyond, I supposed that I had started. Not at all. By the time we reached the carriage depot, just outside the town walls, my driver (oh, clever one!) discovered that we had no lamps, and when the lamps were found to be missing it was further discovered that there were no brackets to hold them even if there had been any. I spent an interesting half-hour watching a cautious carpenter drilling holes, putting in screws, and finally, when, *more Persico*, he found he had drilled holes too large for the screws, tying everything up with string, and then at last we started. It was all a silly, useless waste of time, because the lamps, like those of the foolish virgins, when required for use were found to contain no oil! These are the little matters which keep you informed that you are in Persia.

For the first half of the journey the road runs over a level plain and passes through Kazvin, a fair-sized town, and centre, so to speak, of recent Russian concessions for road-making. Thirty miles beyond, one plunges headlong down the mountains along a fairly well-planned mountain road, which presently launches you through a belt of olives into the riotous profusion of the woods below, and finally on to a jungle-covered plain which stretches from the mountain base to the shores of the Caspian Sea. At one end of this plain is situated Resht, the capital of Ghilan, a town of 70,000 inhabitants and centre of the silk industry, which since its recovery in 1893, after a period of extinction due to disease, has steadily increased, and is now carried on on a larger scale than at any previous period of its history, the disease difficulty having been got over by importing all the eggs from Europe and Asia Minor. Here the carriage service ends, which again calls to your mind the fact that you are in Persia, because you

are still a long way from where you want to get to before you can embark.

In order to get from Resht to Enzeli a series of operations are required. First, you must bargain with a carriage owner to take you over the four or five miles of execrable road to Pir-i-Bazaar, a crowded wharf on the banks of a small river. Here more bargaining with a perspiring crowd of native boat-owners, the possessors of an extraordinarily variegated vocabulary, before you can be transferred to the mouth of the river, where you may catch a small steamer if you are lucky enough to hit upon its moment of departure, which will then take you across the lagoon to Enzeli. My river-boat failed to effect a connection with the steamer, so I had perforce to be rowed across the lagoon. Finally, I was officiously hurried on board a small steam-launch which lay alongside the Custom-house at Enzeli; there was a piercing screech from the steam-whistle, and we pushed pompously off for our ship, which was said to be lying anchored in open water close by.

You would now suppose that your troubles were really at an end; but no,—once more were we to put up with hope deferred. After steaming aimlessly about in the open water a short distance from the lagoon in a vain endeavour to find our ship, it was decided that she had not arrived,—this was perfectly obvious from the shore, since not a speck was visible on the water, but I suppose it had not occurred to any one to look first,—and we returned once more to spend another weary hour or two on the landing-stage at Enzeli. It was not till near 10 P.M. that we made another attempt, and were at last successful in our efforts to embark. "Alhamdu lillah!" breathed a weary passenger. "Amen," said I.

CENTRAL ASIA

"'Tis the clime of the East, 'tis the land of the Sun,
Can he smile on such deeds as his children have done?
Oh wild as the accents of lovers' farewell
Are the hearts which they bare and the tales which they tell."

—BYRON.

CHAPTER XIV.

BAKU.

Civilisation again—The commercial aspect of Baku—A weird sight—Natural fire—An ancient fire-temple—The boilers of Balakhani—A hundred tons of oil a-day—"Spouters"—The interior of a derrick—A calamity at an oil-well—Statistics of the oil trade—A high excise duty—Price of oil in London and in Russia.

To be travelling once more by the aid of steam, after four months almost incessant caravanning, was certainly a pleasant sensation, and the pleasure was infinitely added to by the extraordinary interest of the journey that lay before me. Behind lay the bleak stretches of the Mesopotamian steppe, the crude outlines and harsh contours of the Persian mountains, the long days of monotonous marching, the hard fare of the wanderer in desert lands, and the miserable accommodation of the Turkish *khan* and the Persian *serai*. The transition from such surroundings to Baku is positively startling. A short journey in a comfortable little steamer up the Caspian, and behold, you step ashore amid what appears to you after your long exile the acme of civilisation. Imposing stone buildings confront you in whichever direction you turn, commodious shops display their wares behind plate-glass windows, a striking green spire with gilded cupola glittering in the sun rises high above the rest from a spacious cathedral, —unmistakable evidence that you are in a Russian

town,—and, above all for you, an excellent hotel, with first-class restaurant and most of the appliances which modern civilisation has devised to make life livable, extends a cordial welcome to the traveller.

That is one aspect of Baku, but there is another far more important, because it represents the sole excuse for the city's existence. As all the world knows, Baku and its 150,000 inhabitants exist upon oil. If there were no oil there would be no Baku. So, in addition to the Baku of lofty houses, well-stocked shops, and spacious streets, there is a *ville noire*, where thousands of tons of crude oil are daily reduced to kerosene, benzine, lubricating oil, and residues for fuel; and there are also at a little distance from the town vast forests of *derricks*, queer grimy-looking pyramidal erections, under cover of which are carried on those mysterious operations of boring and pumping which disgorge the wealth-bringing oil from the bowels of the earth. I think Balakhani, with its 2000 derricks packed as closely to one another as the trees of a forest, presents one of the weirdest sights it has ever been my fortune to behold.

A curious feature connected with the oil-fields is the escape of inflammable gas which is observable in various places. It is possible literally to set the Caspian on fire on a calm night in certain spots near the peninsula, and there are places where it is only necessary to make a hole in the ground with your stick to let loose a jet of gas giving a flame of several feet in height.[1] This phenomenon was observed and recorded of old by one Guthrie, a traveller in Persia, who wrote that "in Taurida, in any piece of ground where springs of naphtha

[1] In 'Telegraph and Travel' Sir F. Goldsmid writes: "To say that these fires are curious or worth seeing is to say nothing. They are marvellous, and worthy of classification among natural wonders."

THE OIL-WELLS OF BAKU.

obtain, by merely sticking an iron tube in the earth and applying a light to the upper end, the mineral oil will burn till the tube is decomposed, or for a vast number of years." Small wonder that in such surroundings the creed of the Zend Avesta[1] took root and flourished, or that a glamour of romance should still hang over the old fire-temple at Surah Khani, where there abound fissures in the earth where the mere application of a lighted match is all that is required to restore the once holy flame of the disciples of Zoroaster; but the revered figure of the aged high priest, a once familiar sight in the precincts of the temple, is now no more seen, and with the removal of the last of the fire-worshippers twenty years ago, the care of the sacred flame came to an end, all sentiment being finally destroyed by an enterprising company, who now collect the gas and send it by a pipe to Balakhani, there to be used as required at the wells! There is something pathetic in the sight of the hallowed places of the past converted into a means of assisting the universal craze of modern money-making, and I hastened from this scene of dissipated religious fervour to the noisy activity of the wells themselves, which at least are devoid of illusion, and make no pretence to having ever been anything else but what they are.

As I have said, the oil-fields present an extraordinary sight, and as you breathe in the lurid atmosphere of Balakhani and gaze on the weird scene which surrounds you while you listen to the uncanny noises which proceed from the interior of the grimy derricks, you might well be excused for supposing that you had inadvertently tumbled prematurely into some peculiar

[1] The Bible of the Parsees, by whom, however, it is called simply Avesta, the word Zend being especially employed to denote the translation and exposition of a great part of the Avesta which exists in Pehlevi.

form of Hades. This impression is in no way lessened by a visit to the boiler-house, where steam for working the drills and pumps is generated. Here stand a row of cylindrical boilers, very much the same as boilers anywhere else, but with this difference—there is no coal and there are no ashes, and there is no dirt. At the mouth of the furnace, where, in the case of an ordinary boiler, coal is put in and ashes are raked out, are fixed the mouth-pieces of two small pipes. By means of these a spray of petroleum is driven into the furnace by a jet of steam, and a roaring, all-devouring tongue of fire races from one end of the chamber to the other. The flame thus produced is possessed of a violent vitality, and the roar and hiss is as of the sound of the rushing of many waters.

Mere prosy facts, however, are here as astonishing as abstract impressions. I stood and watched the rich, slimy, dark-green fluid, with its pink glittering froth, being discharged by the great baler of one of the borings on the Bibi Eibat field, and became fascinated when I learnt that I was watching an implement which was alone raising upwards of 100 tons of oil a-day! Later I learned something of "spouters," and the plodding baler with its hard-earned reward of 100 tons seemed a poor thing in comparison. I was not fortunate enough to see one myself, but I caught something of the enthusiasm of those who had. A spouter is gloriously indifferent to restraint, and often blows the derrick to matchwood; but then it throws up anything from 7000 to 10,000 tons of marketable oil—say roughly from £350,000 to £500,000[1]—in the course of twenty-four hours, and what is the cost of a mere derrick as compared to this? Some one who thought

[1] On the basis of 8·11 kopecks a pood, the average price of raw naphtha at the wells in 1901.

it a pity that anything should be lost—a Scotsman no doubt—invented an apparatus for controlling the spouter. It took the form of a steel cap, against which the spouter was to play, but the spouter simply laughed at so puerile a device. At least I know of one which bored a hole as clean as a drill through a 9-inch steel plate in three hours!

Having seen the raw product discharged into reservoirs constructed for the purpose, I next entered a derrick to see what was happening inside. The boring is quite small, only a few inches in diameter, growing smaller too as it descends, and when you come to consider that it will as likely as not go down 2000 feet or more into the bosom of the earth, you realise the extraordinary difficulties which may beset the searcher for oil. One of the worst calamities that can befall him is for something such as an implement to fall down the narrow shaft and get stuck at the bottom. Days of patient and anxious labour may be expended in an endeavour to fish it up again or pound it to powder if this proves impracticable, and, if the worst comes, the well may have to be abandoned and the work begun all over again. One company fished for implements thus fallen for five months, and then gave it up and bored a new well. It is on record that the remarks of the said company on the subject of choked wells were not good to hear. The average cost of boring a well is £5000.

It is difficult to give any adequate idea of the air of bustle and activity which pervades the oil-fields which surround the town. Perhaps the following facts may serve to assist the imagination. In 1902 the aggregate depth bored in sinking new wells and deepening old ones reached a total little short of 46 miles, a figure which was surpassed in each of the four preceding

years, and actually reached the astonishing amount in 1900 of 94 miles 84 yards! In the course of the year 1902, 1895 wells on the Ansheronsk peninsula yielded 10,266,594 tons of naphtha—an average, that is to say, of 5417¾ tons per well. Of this amount 1,528,706½ tons were given by fountains.

Statistics for the year 1901 show an output of 10,822,580⅔ tons from 1924 wells, of which 7,837,096¾ tons were exported in the form of kerosene, lubricants, naphtha residues, and raw naphtha, in the following amounts: kerosene 2,075,806½ tons, lubricants 206,451½ tons, naphtha residues 4,988,709¾ tons, and raw naphtha 566,129 tons.[1]

The number of inactive wells must necessarily increase rapidly, and of late years this increase has been very marked, as many as 1273 wells having become exhausted in the course of 1901, as compared with 842 in the previous year and 594 in 1899, the average yearly number thrown out of work from 1892 up to that time being about 400. Nevertheless, the supply exhibits small signs of becoming exhausted, the output

[1] For the benefit of those who are sufficiently interested, I append the following comparison between the Baku and American oil-fields:—

	Tons.		Tons.
Output of Baku oil-fields, 1901, .	10,822,580⅔	Output of American oil-fields, 1901—	
		Pennsylvania . . .	4,116,129
		Lima	2,393,548½
			6,509,677½
Exports from Baku, 1901—		Exports from America, 1901—	
Kerosene	2,075,806½	Kerosene	2,453,225⅝
Lubricants	206,451½	Lubricants	250,000
Naphtha residues . . .	4,988,709¾	Naphtha residues . . .	90,322½
Raw naphtha . . .	566,129	Raw naphtha	377,419½
		Benzine and gaseous . .	135,483⅝
	7,837,096¾		3,306,451½
Average daily yield of the wells of the Ansheronsk peninsula, 1901 . . .	29,661	Average daily yield of the wells of the United States, 1901	18,198

for 1901 showing an increase of 1,145,161 tons on the previous year, and of 10,467,742 tons on the output of twenty years ago. The capital sunk has of course largely increased, as is shown by the fact that in December 1902 there were 1423 wells yielding oil, as compared with 324 in the same month ten years ago, 564 new wells being bored in the course of the year 1902, as compared with 200 in 1892, while in 1900 as many as 1010 wells were sunk.

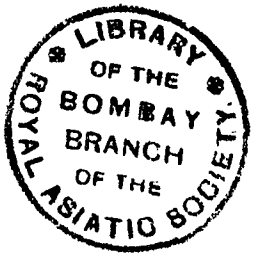
Oil from Baku naturally travels far, the rival wells of Pennsylvania and Lima being situated at a comfortable distance on the other side of the globe; and the first thing I saw on the outskirts of Irkutsk, in far-off Siberia, was a large oil-tank bearing the name of Nobel of Baku, and one of the last things I noticed at the end of my journey was an office of the same firm at Dalni on the confines of the Far East. The huge export, soon to be further assisted by means of a government pipe laid from Baku to Tiflis, similar to the one already existing between Tiflis and Batum—in 1901, 1,198,387 tons of naphtha products were exported abroad from Batum as compared with 51,613 tons to Russia—is, however, to a certain extent artificial, the high excise duty of 60 kopecks per pood (about 4¼d. per gallon) being responsible for the prices in Russia being as high and sometimes higher than they are in London! Thus, though the average price of kerosene at Baku[1] in 1901 was about 1d. a gallon, the excise duty brought it up to over 5d., the price in London in December of that year varying from 6¼d. to 6½d. a gallon. For further comparison take the prices of kerosene in December 1900, which were at Baku[2] 1½d. a gallon, at Tzaritzin in South Russia 6½d. a gallon, and in London 5½d. to 6¼d. a gallon. At the

[1] Actual price free on waggon. [2] Ibid.

same time, the price of kerosene in New York was 3½d. a gallon.

I have been at some pains to give statistics of the oil trade, partly because, owing to the difficulty of obtaining reliable data, they are seldom placed before the public, and partly because, without adducing figures, it is impossible to give any idea of the magnitude and importance of the industry.[1] Let me now invite any one who is wearied by the contemplation of so imposing an array of statistics to accompany me across the Caspian to that land where facts and figures have ever been shrouded by a veil of mystery and romance.

[1] It is worth while drawing attention to the rapidly increasing demand for liquid fuel. Engines on the Transcaspian railway and steamers on the Volga have long been driven by naphtha residues. It is already in use in the Russian navy, and is being experimented with in more than one ship in our own.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CHAPTER XV.[1]

THE TRANSCASPIAN RAILWAY IN 1903.

Origin of the idea of railway communication with Central Asia—The chimerical conception of M. de Lesseps—With the defeat of Lomakin, railway schemes are revived—Lack of suitable transport—General Annenkoff's line—England suspicious—The Pendjeh incident—Renewal of work on the Transcaspian railway—Completion of the line—Leave Baku—Krasnovodsk—On board the train—Geok Teppe—A false report—The steppe in spring—Khiva—Merve—The Murgab branch to the Afghan frontier—A desert of sand—The bridge over the Oxus—Reach Bokhara.

"THE great difficulty Russia has to contend with in Central Asia consists in immense distances, intersected by waterless wastes, which impede the progress of armies. In overcoming this, the camel, however useful for peaceful caravan purposes, has been tried and found utterly wanting."[2] And Russia wanted above all things to send armies into Central Asia, so with commendable wisdom she lost no time in making such arrangements as would enable her to do so.

[1] For the facts concerning the construction of the railway I am indebted to Lord Curzon's 'Russia in Central Asia,' Messrs Skrine and Ross's 'Heart of Asia,' and Mr C. Marvin's 'Russians at Merve and Herat'; while to the proprietors of 'The Times' I am also indebted for permission to make use of an article of my own descriptive of the railway at the present day, which has already appeared in their columns.

[2] 'The Akhal Tekke Oasis and Roads to India.' General Annenkoff. Translated by Charles Marvin.

The idea of rapid communication between Russia and her recently acquired possessions in Central Asia had been mooted long before the days of the advance from the Caspian, it is true; but it was the lack of suitable transport required by the expedition which was to be hurled against the Turkoman horde to revenge the defeat of Lomakin in 1879 that was responsible for the actual construction of the Transcaspian railway.

When Tashkent became a Russian possession in 1865, the streams of the Sir Daria, and, after the conquest of Khiva and practical absorption of Bokhara in 1873, of the Oxus were looked to to supply the need of rapid communication between Russia proper and Turkestan, and it was not until the difficulties of navigation on these rivers proved the scheme impracticable that the project of a Central Asian railway was seriously thought of. With Tashkent, in the heart of Turkestan, in the hands of the Russians, and the fierce and unruly tribes of Transcaspia still beyond the zone of Russian ambition, it was only natural that that place should have been the objective of the earlier schemes of railway extension, and in 1873 a Russian official was ordered to prepare a report on the possibility of a line from Orenburg. Out of these suggestions grew the chimerical conception of M. de Lesseps of a railway from Calais to Calcutta — a project, however, which soon sank into oblivion with the cold reception of England, and the departure of its originator to Panama. The less ambitious though, nevertheless, costly undertaking of uniting Orenburg and Tashkent by a line across the many hundreds of miles of unpopulated and unproductive desert, in spite of the patronage of General Kaufmann, was

likewise regarded with little favour by the Government at St Petersburg, and soon fell into the background, where it was doomed to slumber till wakened thirty years later by the powerful hand of M. Witte.

With the failure of such schemes the idea of a railway to Central Asia was for the time being banished, and it was not until 1879, when Lomakin suffered a severe defeat at the hands of the Turkomans, that the project was again brought to the forefront of Russian policy in Asia, this time to take definite form, and to come into being in after-years in the shape of the military Transcaspian railway.

The reverse suffered by the Russians at the hands of an Asiatic foe was one which shook the whole fabric of Muscovite power in Central Asia, requiring an immediate and decisive campaign of revenge to re-establish the shaken structure on a firm base once more, and operations were at once taken in hand to repair the damage which had been sustained.

The chief difficulty encountered was occasioned by the want of suitable transport, the utter futility of relying upon camels for this purpose having already been amply demonstrated by the expeditions of 1879 and 1880, in the former of which two-thirds of the camels used had succumbed, while only 350 out of a total of 12,596 had survived the advance of 1880.[1] To overcome this difficulty a service of traction-engines was proposed by General Petrusevitch, and later on the construction of a tramway between Tchikishlar

[1] These are the figures given in Lord Curzon's 'Russia in Central Asia.' In General Annenkoff's 'Akhal Tekke Oasis,' already quoted, he says: "During the Akhal Tekke expedition of 1879 as many as 9600 camels perished out of 10,000."

and the edge of the Tekke oasis was mooted; but a far more important project came into being when General Skobeleff, who had taken with him General Annenkoff, the controller of military transport, decided in favour of Krasnovodsk as against Tchikishlar as his base of operations. A hundred miles of steel rails, lying idle at Bender, which had been purchased and stored "for use in the Balkan peninsula in 1878 in the event of the collapse of the Congress of Berlin,"[1] were transported to the eastern shore of the Caspian, and the first link of the railway which now runs for over 1200 miles to Andijan and Tashkent, and is destined in the future to join hands with the great trans-continental railway in the north, was forged under the powerful influence and able direction of General Annenkoff.

The line which had thus been built solely with a view to affording the transport necessary for the army advancing against the Turkomans failed in its immediate object, since Skobeleff had secured his great victory of Geok Teppe before the line was completed. But the far-reaching possibilities of a railway running east along the frontiers of Persia and Afghanistan had at length begun to dawn on the minds of Russian statesmen, and though the original reason for its construction was no longer there, the building of the line was nevertheless carried out; and in December 1881, eleven months after the collapse of the Turkoman power, the first train steamed into Kizil Arvat.

At this point the railway rested for three and a half years, the suspicions of England, aroused by the surveys of Lessar on the Afghan borderland, and the opposition of the Turkestan party, headed by the governor of Tashkent, General Tchernaieff, who

[1] Russia in Central Asia. Lord Curzon.

regarded with unconcealed disfavour a scheme which could not fail to enhance the importance of the Transcaspian territories at the expense of their own, constituting the chief obstacles to a further advance; but in the spring of 1885 occurred the Pendjeh incident on the Afghan frontier, which determined once for all the future of the Transcaspian railway, and from this time the policy of railway extension in this part of the world "emerged as a menace to England and a warning to Asia."

And so it happened that while the British were constructing the railways of Hurnai and the Bolan in Baluchistan, the Russians were steadily pushing their long steel arm into the heart of Asia.

Work began on June 30, 1885, the rolling camp which carried the staff, workmen, and material moving forward at the rate of four miles a-day as the line was laid. Beyond Kizil Arvat 22,000 Tekke labourers levelled the soil, with a result that Merve, which had succumbed to the intrigues of Alikhanoff and the bravado of Komaroff early in 1884, was reached in a period of fourteen months. In August 1886 work was begun on the section between Merve and Chardjui on the Oxus, and in spite of the terrible difficulties experienced from driving sand, the whole distance of 141 miles was completed in little more than four months, and the railway brought into working order throughout the 664 miles from the Caspian to the Oxus.

The river here is at the present time spanned by a fine steel girder bridge; but such an undertaking was considered out of the question in 1887, and a huge and cumbrous wooden viaduct was carried across the water on piles driven into the river-bed. The engineer who was responsible for this extraordinary structure was a Pole, Bielinski by name—and when it comes to be con-

sidered that he laid a way 4600 yards in length, including 2270 yards of water-way, resting upon no less than 3330 wooden piles, between June 1887 and January 1888, for the very moderate sum of £44,000,[1] he must certainly be credited with an excellent performance.

In September 1887 the 216 miles between the Oxus and Samarkand were taken in hand, the latter place being reached in May 1888, and by June 1 trains were running regularly from the Caspian to the ancient capital of Timur, a distance of 879 miles. Here for the moment the railway halted; but in 1895 works were begun for the prolongation of the line to Andijan and Tashkent, a distance altogether of 401 miles, and at the present time trains run regularly to both these places. In addition to the main line, a branch of 192 miles has been built from Merve to Kushk on the Afghan frontier, which has been open to traffic since 1899.

Such in brief is the history of the construction of the Transcaspian railway; let me now invite the reader to accompany me in a journey over it as it exists at the present day.

At five o'clock one evening towards the end of April I boarded the steamship *Skobeleff*, a new vessel belonging to the Mercury and Caucasus Steam Navigation Company, lit throughout with electric light, and possessed of comfortable cabins and an excellent *cuisine*, and two hours later we left noisy, smelly, money-making Baku behind and steamed eastward into the night. Seventeen or eighteen hours is ample time to cross the Caspian in fine weather, and by midday the

[1] This is the sum given in Messrs Skrine and Ross's 'Heart of Asia' as the actual cost, without the pay of transport, and of the railway battalion engaged in erecting it. In Lord Curzon's 'Russia in Central Asia' the cost is stated to have been only £30,000.

KRASNOVODSK.

day following we were disembarking on the landing-stage at Krasnovodsk, the point of departure of the Transcaspian railway, with whose clean-looking white houses, pretentious railway-station, and forbidding setting of bare brown hills previous wanderings had made me familiar. There is no cause to envy any one whose fate dictates a sojourn at Krasnovodsk. Just as oil is the *raison d'être* of Baku, so the necessity for the Transcaspian railway having a starting-point somewhere is alone responsible for the existence of Krasnovodsk. They have another point in common—namely, entire absence of fresh water, and in both towns the whole population is supplied from a huge distillery. Of course, there is not a blade of grass or sign of vegetation of any sort, while it would be difficult to imagine a spot into which the noonday rays could beat down with greater fury, or where you could receive a more vivid impression of a land parched and stricken by the sun. If, as is commonly reported, you can cook eggs by merely laying them on the sands of Baluchistan, you should find no difficulty in frying bacon on the pavements of Krasnovodsk!

Towards evening the white carriages of the train, so soon about to start on its wonderful journey, drew up alongside the platform, and a short inspection revealed the fact that innovations had lately been made. Until quite recently there were no first-class carriages on the line, and loud have been the complaints by travellers of the inconveniences they have suffered. Now, however, I found a first-class carriage and restaurant car attached, and as we steamed out of the station punctually at five o'clock everything promised well for a comfortable journey. The blue waters of the Caspian remained in sight till dark, and then we turned east and held our way steadfastly for the heart of Asia.

In the small hours of the morning the great railway depot and workshops of Kizil Arvat were passed, and dawn revealed a desolate land all round, broken only by a chain of sullen mountains on the Persian frontier to the south. At ten o'clock we steamed slowly into a small wayside station—Geok Teppe. What a tumultuous whirl of thought the two small words set going. We were passing through the district which held out to the last against the advance of the great white power from the North. One by one the khanates had succumbed. Turkestan, Tchimkent, and Tashkent fell within a single year, Samarkand and the rich province of Zerafshan were long since gone, then came Khiva and Khokand. But the fierce Turkomans, brought up in an atmosphere of blood and pillage, fought desperately to the end. Here, within 50 yards of the railway-station, the Russian general Lomakin was defeated with heavy loss. The result was a severe blow to Russian prestige and a check in their advance. The day of reckoning went back two years, but when it came it was decisive. What need to recall the elaborate precautions of the Russians as they advanced under the genius Skobeleff, or the terrible three weeks during which 35,000 Tekke Turkomans were besieged in their stronghold Dengil Teppe? It is now over twenty years ago,[1] but the horror of the death-grip when Russians attacked and Turkomans attacked back, and the ghastly terror of the last pursuit, will live for centuries. Twelve hundred Russian soldiers lay dead or wounded; nine thousand Turkoman warriors went where dead Turkomans go. Inside the ramparts the ground is now covered with grass and scrub. A monument surmounted by a cross, and smaller crosses at other points, stand in memory of

[1] The Russians captured the fort, if it can be described as such, on January 24, 1881.

GEOK TEPPE.

the Russian slain. All is now perfect peace. The Turkoman of to-day examines the mouldering mud walls curiously, and saunters through the museum, a small building of white stone containing Turkoman arms, pictures of the onslaught, and portraits of the leading men concerned, erected between the ramparts and the station. The train is an odd accessory and seems out of place, but it is an unmistakable sign of the times.

Close upon Geok Teppe comes Ashkabad, the capital of Transcaspia. From here there is a highroad to Meshed. I have seen it somewhere described as good,—in a Foreign Office report I think,—and so it is as far as the frontier. Let the man who would eulogise the Persian section travel over it. I have, and the memory lives! There is another fallacy about Ashkabad and the Persian frontier, that they are connected by rail. I was myself under this delusion not so very long ago, having been informed of the fact by an eyewitness! There is no branch line from Ashkabad or any other point on the railway until the famous Murgab is reached.

After Ashkabad, quiet for a space; one requires it after the sensation of Geok Teppe. Looking out of the window the mountains still run parallel on the south, the lower slopes covered with grass, the higher peaks patched with snow. Everywhere else a vast sea of waving grass, scarlet poppies, and other flowers. This is the steppe in spring, and is but a transient phase of the wild limitless plain. A little later the riotous verdure will be gone and the land will revert to its usual state, a parched white wilderness. That is inevitable in a land where the sun beats for six months from an unflecked sky.

As you steam steadily on, your mind ponders on

many things. You remember that far away across the desert to the north lies Khiva. A man once made a reputation by riding there: no one would do so now—save perhaps for folly. For Khiva, like Bokhara, has had its day, and the revolving wheel of fortune has consigned its khan to the unambitious position of a nonentity. When the world forces come to be summed up in Asia, Khiva need no longer be taken into account even as a pawn upon the board. Still it was not always thus, as the records of Russian expeditions could tell. Three centuries ago the Yaik Cossacks, pirate scourges of the Caspian Sea, set forth for the rich province called Khowarizm or Khiva, to sack its capital Organtsh.[1] But they reckoned without their host. Cut off from water by the exasperated Khivans, they fell fighting desperately against overwhelming odds, quenching their thirst while life remained with the blood of the slain. A second expedition met with no better fortune, but the culminating disaster was left for yet a third under the leadership of the ataman Schemai. Lost in the pathless steppe, stranded finally on the inhospitable shores of the Aral Sea, their provisions exhausted, they found themselves in a sorry plight. It is on record that "at first the unhappy ones killed each other, in order to have human flesh to eat; but at last, when brought to the very verge of perishing, they summoned the Khivans and voluntarily surrendered themselves as slaves."

The early years of the eighteenth century saw a whole Russian army cut up and its leaders massacred

[1] Organtsh, the town we speak of as Khiva, described by one M'Gregor, Secretary to the Board of Trade in the 'Forties, as "a town of mud huts, with three stone mosques and a mud palace." Dr Wolff describes how when he was travelling in Bokhara he heard the cry from the watch-towers of that country, "Watch! watch! for the people of Organtsh may come, kill your cattle, and destroy the child in the mother's womb!"

by the cunning of its khan. The head of its leader, Prince Bekovitch, was despatched as a gift to a neighbouring khan, while those of his staff served for ornaments to the city walls. It is further said that the khan, actuated no doubt by the same desire for a vindictive revenge which led Agha Mohammed to have the bones of his persecutor Nadir Shah removed from their resting-place at Meshed and placed beneath the threshold of his palace, in order that he might have the exquisite delight of walking over them, caused a large drum to be made of the prince's skin, that he might have the supreme satisfaction of hearing his enemy beaten! While the expedition under Perovski was retreating to Orenburg in 1839, having ignominiously failed to get more than half-way, two English officers, Captain Abbott and Sir Richmond Shakespeare, who had penetrated to the khanate, effected the chief object of the ill-starred expedition from the north, by obtaining the release of the Russian prisoners by diplomacy,[1] and a few years later Khiva was given a certain international importance as being one of the countries which the Tsar Nicholas agreed to leave "to serve as a neutral zone interposed between Russia and India, so as to preserve them from dangerous contact."

So late as 1872 a Russian force under General Markosoff suffered defeat at the hands of the Khivans at Igdy; and in the following year the now historic expedition, which was "to punish acts of brigandage, to recover fifty Russian prisoners, and to teach the

[1] According to Dr Wolff it was thanks to the diplomacy of Sir R. Shakespeare that the Russian prisoners were liberated. In his 'Bokhara' he writes: "Mr Abbott, who preceded him (Shakespeare), was foolish enough to advise the King of Khiva not to give up the Russian slaves until he had treated with the Russian emperor; but Shakespeare was wise enough to recommend their immediate cession."

khan that such conduct on his part could not be continued with impunity," brought about that ruler's downfall. So great was the stir caused in England by the advance of Kaufmann's expedition that it was deemed necessary to reassure the British Government, and Count Schouvaloff was instructed to inform Lord Granville that "not only was it far from the intention of the emperor to take possession of Khiva, but positive orders had been prepared to prevent it." Nevertheless, Khiva fell; a most unjustifiable massacre of the Yomud Turkomans was indulged in by way of an extra military flourish, and a treaty signed with Bokhara, which gave over to Russia all Khivan territory on the right bank of the Oxus, opened the river to free navigation, and the whole of the khanate to Russian trade.

At 11 P.M. I awoke with a start. We were just drawing up alongside of a brightly lit platform. I knew in a moment where we were—we were at Merve. Merve is a name which has rung through England. Not the Merve of ancient splendour as capital of the world of Islam, when the Kalifs ruled from the Mediterranean to Tibet, and from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf—though the ruins of this Merve, too, may be seen ten miles away from the present town, close to the station of Bairam Ali—but the Merve where, in 1881, O'Donovan saw from 7000 to 8000 Turkomans working daily on the vast earthworks of Kushid Khan Kala, which was to raise an impenetrable barrier to the Russian advance. But neither the Turkomans nor the frightened protests of an awe-struck Cabinet in London saved the stronghold of the Turkomans from the Russian maw. Indignant denials of any intention to take it, from St Petersburg, were thankfully swallowed by the trem-

bling politicians at Westminster, and Merve was left to her fate. Nor had she very long to wait, for the expedition of the disguised Russian officer, Alikhanoff, to Merve in 1882 was followed by another of a similar nature in the early days of 1884, when England had her hands conveniently full elsewhere, which resulted in the fall of the place with the firing of scarcely a shot. And that is how it happens that Merve is to-day a Russian town, and an important cantonment for Russian troops.

Beyond the zone of light afforded by the station lamps all was dark, silent, and mysterious, and then suddenly out of the darkness and silence of the night loomed a ghostly engine speeding from the south. Here was material for another train of thought, for that line to the south runs to the Afghan frontier, and is as jealously guarded from foreign gaze as is the Tibetan oracle of Lhassa. The Russian advanced post at Kushk corresponds exactly to our own at Chaman, and without a doubt Russian rails could be laid to Herat as soon as ever our own could be to Kandahar. It is whispered that the terminus of the line is to be found inside the walls of a heavily armed fort, garrisoned by a number of troops which at least reaches four figures, and with barrack accommodation for even more. There is also said to be a light railway running over the twelve miles between Kushk post and Chehel Duckteran, while it is asserted that the length of rails stored within the fort is greater than is the distance to Herat. Some day, when Afghanistan as such has ceased to exist, here will lie the direct overland route to India—but not yet.

After Merve, peace again; and when I wake up in the morning miles upon miles of sand! Sand as far as the eye can see—and a great deal farther. Parallel

with the line on either side runs a small quick-set fence, or rather the top of one, for the roots are far down in the sand, binding it and keeping it from burying the line. Had it not been for the curious properties of this shrub—saxsaul—it would have been wellnigh impossible to have built and held the line; even as it was it must have been heart-breaking work.

Suddenly the sand gives way to a cultivated oasis, and ere long we pull up at Chardjui on the banks of the Amu Daria (ancient Oxus). I remember reading recently that it had been rechristened Amu Daria after the famous river on whose banks it stands; but Chardjui is still writ in large letters over the centre of the building. Here the engineer has been recently at work, for the old wooden viaduct, on its 3330 wooden piles, has been replaced by a fine steel girder bridge a verst and a half in length, which we crossed in four minutes—a great improvement on the twenty minutes required for the passage of the older construction. Having with much difficulty and labour driven the huge wooden stakes into the bed of the river, they would give a good deal now to remove them again, but some few have up to the present time resisted every effort to displace them, and stand a source of constant irritation to the helmsman responsible for the safe passage of the craft of the Oxus flotilla.

Once beyond reach of the life-giving water, sand again. Not an even yellow expanse, but great ugly corrugated bluffs and hummocks, like the churning pits and mountains of an angry sea, the small isolated stone buildings forming the stations looking terribly lonely in the vast reaches of the desert; but before very long we run into an oasis once more, thanks to the proximity of the Zerafshan, and by midday I

have alighted at the station over which stands the word Kagahn. Kagahn suggests little enough, but Bokhara suggests a great deal, and Kagahn is the name given to the station at New Bokhara since the Russians took courage and constructed a branch line two years ago, which now deposits the traveller under the very walls of Old Bokhara itself.

CHAPTER XVI.

BOKHARA THE NOBLE.

New Bokhara—The fascination of Old Bokhara—Its bazaars—A picture for an artist's brush—A scourge of the East—Monuments of the past—The power of the King of Bokhara—The citadel—Its ancient clock—A piteous tale—Violent death—The State prison—Its jailer—The scene inside—Khanikoff's description of the lower dungeon—The story of Stoddart and Conolly—Nasrullah, King of Bokhara—The journey of Dr Wolff—The notorious vermin pit—Bokhara described as it is to-day—Authoritative writers on Bokhara.

I THINK Bokhara is one of the most fascinating places which I have seen in the East—real Bokhara, of course, that is. There is nothing in the smallest degree fascinating about New Bokhara, which is simply a Russian town. It has its conveniences certainly, and that is something to be thankful for, even though they be devoid of attraction. For there is a hotel at New Bokhara, and it is even tolerably clean. It is not kept by a Russian if I remember right, but you at once realise that you are in a Russian town by the huge penny-in-the-slot musical-box, which is the most conspicuous piece of furniture in the apartment set aside for meals. It does not seem to matter to a Russian in the least what the music is like, so long as there *is* music of some sort to accompany him through his repast.

But to return to Old Bokhara, eight miles away

across the plain. I do not know why it is that it should attract one more than other cities of the Orient; I only know that it is so. There is an atmosphere pervading it which defies analysis. For from the moment that you pass through its mouldering gates to stroll through the dust of its time-worn streets, or stand beneath the domes of its sombre-lit bazaars, you live in another world. No breath of the West penetrates the musty atmosphere that you breathe here, heavy with the weight of years.

It is pleasant enough in the softened light of these same bazaars, and cool, too, compared with the glare and the heat outside. A dark-skinned Hindu, with bright orange caste-mark flaming upon his brow, sits solemnly surveying the scene. You may purchase odd coins of the country from him, for the Hindu is the money-changer of the East. All round you, sitting or reclining after the manner of their kind in the box-like little shops of the Arcade, are the merchants and their clerks, ready to bargain with you for their silks and their velvets, their *khelats* and their *souzanis*, their *nahs* boxes and ornaments, their *kalians* and beautifully worked ewers of brass. And on all sides rises that hum which is an inseparable accompaniment of an Eastern crowd.

Side-walks branch off in all directions, where the stranger might soon be lost, but we have a native *jhigit* to guide us, kindly lent by the Russian resident at New Bokhara, and we follow him as he picks his way nimbly through the crowd, to emerge presently in an open square surrounded by shops and shady trees, while stone steps lead down to a large tank of water, which fills the whole of the centre of the enclosure.

What a picture for an artist's brush! What a perfect presentation of the unregenerate East! A

white-turbaned Mullah brushes haughtily by; little groups of Bokharans, picturesque in long gaudy-coloured robes, squat on the house-roofs or on the stone steps in the shade of the trees, leisurely sipping green tea and smoking the kalian. Here and there a scantily clad figure, attracted by the cool depths of the water, sits dangling a not too clean foot in it, while he performs sundry ablutionary operations for an equally not too clean body. Presently he is joined by a friend with his water-skin, who passes the time of day with him as he allows it to fill. The water is for drinking, and might suggest unpleasant thoughts elsewhere, but you see nothing strange in it here.

It does not do, indeed, to look too closely or too critically at the men and manners of the East. You look here for the whole effect of the picture, not individually at its component parts. It is the golden sunshine from an azure sky, the brilliant colouring and graceful outline, the deep contrasts in light and shade that fill the imagination and delight the eye. To look too closely would be to reveal the brazen sky of an Eastern summer, the dirt and squalor of mud-built shanties, the ghastly horror of unthinkable disease.

For here more, perhaps, than elsewhere have the people been chastised for the abomination of their lives and the unutterable evil of their ways. The scourge of the *rishta* lies heavily upon them,[1] the terrible wasting and putrefaction of the flesh caused by leprosy and other kindred disease is only too painfully in evidence, and men sink prematurely to the grave, stricken with that "curse

[1] A worm which installs itself under the skin, causing unsightly disfigurement unless carefully and adroitly extracted. "So common is this malady in Bokhara," writes Lord Curzon, "that every fifth person suffers from it."—Russia in Central Asia.

BOKHARA.

"A fountain, filled with water, and shaded by lofty trees, where idlers and newsmongers assemble round the wares of Asia and Europe, which are here exposed for sale."—ALEXANDER BURNS.

from God," under stress of which it is said that "the skin becomes dry and shrivelled, the hair of the body falls off, the nails and teeth tumble out, and the whole body assumes a horrible and unseemly appearance." [1] And this is the city of which its priests delight to declare that whereas in all other parts of the globe light descends upon earth, it ascends from holy Bokhara!

But the bazaar and its inmates are not solely responsible for the fascination of Bokhara. There are monuments which recall stirring tales of the past. On one side of the Rigistan or market square rise the massive walls and gateway of the ark or citadel, built more than eight centuries ago by Alp Arslan, "the valiant lion," and it is borne in upon you that this is "Bokhara the Noble," the city which has seen great days, and whose rulers have made whole pages of the strange history of the ancient world. There is something which inevitably appeals to you in the strange vicissitudes through which it has passed. Here, long ago, in the days of the Amir Ismail, was the capital of a vast empire and far-famed seat of learning and culture. Nine centuries passed, and great changes were sweeping across the map of Asia: rival Powers from the West were bidding for the ancient kingdoms of the East, and the first half of the nineteenth century saw both British and Russian aspirants at the Court of Bokhara.

Those were the days of the bloody Nasrullah. The prolonged torment undergone by the two English emissaries, Stoddart and Conolly, as they languished in the foul depths of a vermin-infested dungeon, and their eventual decapitation in the market-place in 1843, caused the name to stink in the nostrils of Englishmen.

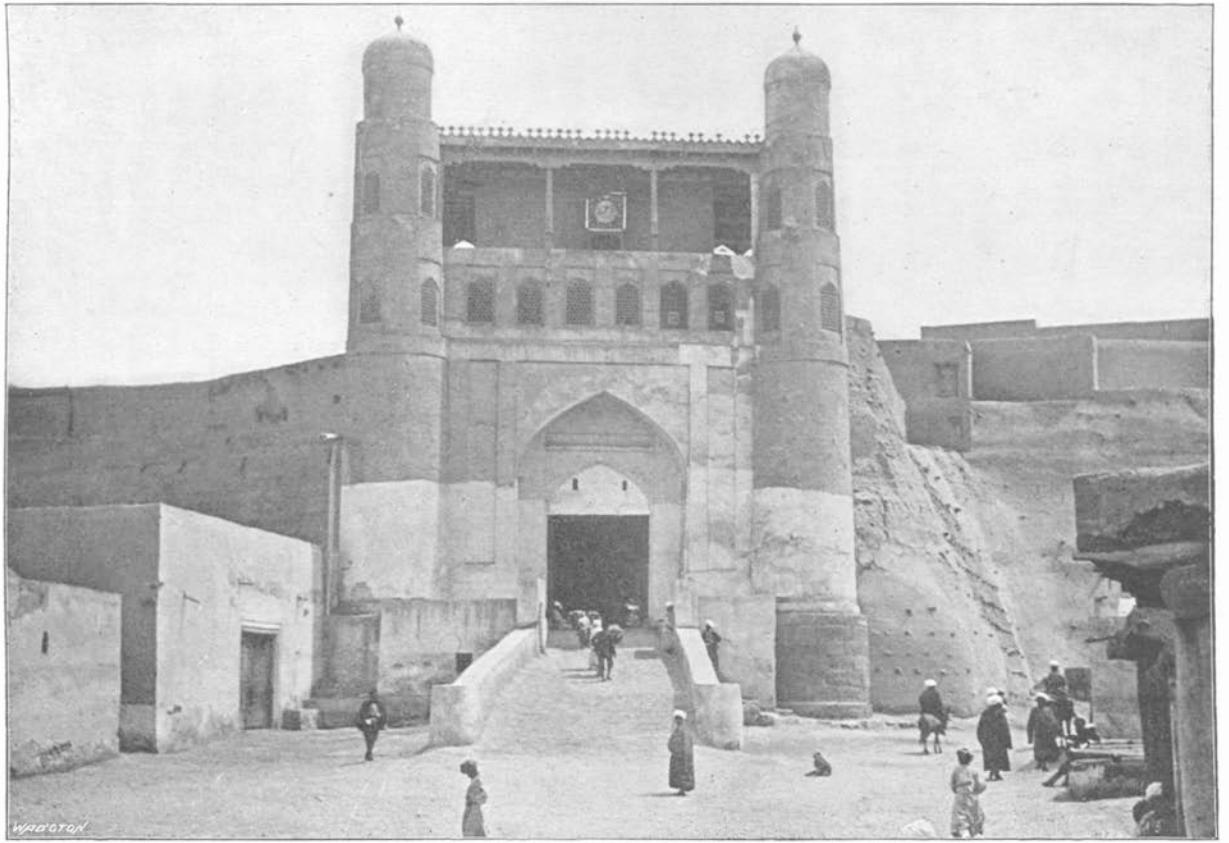
[1] Travels into Bokhara. Sir A. Burns. He describes this disease as a peculiar kind of leprosy, which he calls *mukkom* or *kolee*.

No light has ever been thrown on the mystery of the inaction of the Government on that occasion, who, not content with doing nothing of themselves to inquire into the fate of their two emissaries, put every sort of obstacle in the way of others who were willing to undertake the task of discovery. The description of the adventurous journey eventually made with this object by the eccentric missionary, the Rev. Joseph Wolff, is one which is of unsurpassed interest even at the present day, though his arrival was too late to effect their release.

There is, I believe, no actual reason why such atrocities should not occur at the present day, for the reigning Amir has the power to do what he will with his own subjects. Indeed, Lord Curzon, writing in 1889, tells of a captive, who had himself committed a cold-blooded murder in the town, having his eyelids cut off and his eyes gouged out, and being then tied to the tail of an ass and dragged to the market-place to be quartered and thrown to the dogs, only a short time before his visit.[1] But beyond the privilege of disposing of his own subjects, little real power is left to the ruler of Bokhara, for when Bokhara is spoken of as an independent State, it is but in name, be it understood, that its independence exists.

There was a rumour current in native circles when I was in those parts that the lord of Bokhara had decided to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. The difficulties and fatigue of such a journey were pointed out to him by his kind friends the Russians, and he was strongly advised not to go. With reflection, however, the desire of his soul to behold the great centre of the Mohammedan universe—towards which he turned in daily prayer—increased manyfold, and he at length made it

[1] Russia in Central Asia.



THE CITADEL OF BOKHARA.

known that he would go. What happened then? Why, the iron showed through the velvet of the glove, and he was peremptorily forbidden to leave his kingdom! And the Amir now realises—what all the rest of the world realised long ago—that the ruler of Bokhara the Noble has fallen from his high estate.

I have mentioned this because it gives a correct idea of the status of Bokhara to-day. There is no reason why it should not remain independent to this extent for many years to come—indeed there are two very good reasons why it should: firstly, because it suits the Russians to enjoy all the advantages of practical possession while they suffer none of the disadvantages entailed by the responsibility of actual occupation; and, secondly, because it is affirmed that at the time of his coronation the reigning Emperor gave his word to the Amir that the position of Bokhara should remain unchanged so long as he was Tsar of all the Russias.

But I am wandering away from the citadel which rises straight in front of us as we cross the Rigistan. The accompanying illustration shows the great gateway which gives access to it, constructed by Nadir Shah in 1742, and high above the entrance, midway between the two round towers which support it, may be seen the dilapidated dial of an ancient clock. It is a curiosity in Bokhara, and it ticks out a piteous tale of woe.

An Italian of Parma, Giovanni Orlandi by name, had the misfortune to fall into the hands of Nasrullah, King of Bokhara. It is said that he was sold with the connivance of a Russian of Orenburg, who grew rich on the profits of an illegal and infamous slave traffic. On his refusing to become a convert to Islamism, he was thrown into prison and condemned to die; but on promising to construct for the Amir a machine for

measuring time, he was pardoned, and the clock which he then made still stands as a witness to his mechanical genius. For a time all went well, Orlandi was granted his liberty, and became the artificer of the king. But it chanced that one day, when in a state of intoxication, he offended his master, by whom he had been summoned to repair a telescope which he had recently made for him. Imprisonment for a second time now became his lot, and a renewal of the command that he should join the followers of the Prophet was issued. This time his fate was sealed, and in the year 1851 he was led out to execution. As a foretaste of what was to come the skin of his throat was first cut, and he was taken back to his cell to ponder during the long hours of darkness on the advisability of his renouncing his religion. It speaks volumes for his stoutness of heart that even now he remained steadfast in his faith, and on the following day the sentence which, with fiendish cruelty, had already been in part carried out, was completed.[1]

At no very great distance another building catches the eye in the shape of a gigantic tower called the Minar Kalan. Of course it has horror connected with it—what building is there in Bokhara that has not? It rises to a height of upwards of 200 feet, is circular, tapering slightly towards the top, and is covered with beautiful designs in carved brick. Imagine a flight through 200 feet of air, bound hand and foot, with the

[1] There seems to be some confusion as to the exact story of the ill-starred watchmaker. Modesto Gavazzi, an Italian who visited Bokhara in 1863, and who is responsible for the above details, says, "Twelve or fifteen years back there lived at Orenburg" the Russian who, he says, was responsible for Orlandi's captivity. But Wolff speaks of Orlandi as being in Bokhara when he was there in 1843, and whereas, according to Gavazzi, he was unwavering in his determination not to renounce Christianity, Wolff speaks of him as having turned Mussulman.

THE PRISON, BOKHARA.

hard ground and a yelling mob at the end of it! That is what criminals in the Bokhara of old had to look forward to; for they were taken to the summit, bound, and precipitated from one of the apertures which look out over the market-place beneath. I was not so fortunate as to observe, as did Mr Henry Norman, the depression in the ground at the foot of the tower, caused by the fall of generations of victims, but I shuddered as I stood and gazed up all the same.

But there is another building which, could it speak, would tell tales which might well wring tears from a stone, and that building is the zindan or state prison. Built on the top of a low mound, surrounded by crumbling brick walls, with low unpretentious wooden doors, it presents no imposing appearance, but the scene which confronts you within is not good to see.

The jailer was corpulent and altogether evil-looking, and an unpleasant smile stole over his vicious physiognomy as he invited me to come in. Perhaps he was thinking of the excruciating torture which the accursed infidel had gone through in Bokhara in the past; but the smile which such recollections conjured up served only to illuminate the peculiar villainy which shone from what Sheridan would no doubt have described as "an unforgiving eye and a damned disinheriting countenance!"

The scene which presents itself at the present day is enough to make one's flesh creep at the thought of what was in the past. After passing through a sort of guard-room and across an open yard, I came upon two cells, one opening out of the other. Both were small, absolutely bare, filthily dirty, and sepulchrally gloomy—for light, it would appear, is not considered a necessary element in the existence of the criminal of Bokhara. But it was the inmates that afforded the crowning

spectacle in this picture of inconceivable misery. Packed tightly together, occupying every inch of the bare mud floor, lay a reeking mass of worn-out, hope-forsaken humanity. The moment that the low door was opened and I stood hesitating on the threshold, a dozen wretches pushed themselves up into a sitting posture to stare vacantly at the intruder, and whenever any one moved there was a grim rustling and clanking of chains, for one and all were burdened with huge fetters and manacles of iron.

I am not of a particularly squeamish disposition—I have seen too much of what has been described as the "frank indecency of the East" to be that—but I admit that as I picked my way among the piteous inmates of this foul cell and peered into the gloom of the dungeon beyond, conscious all the time of the presence of the hateful personality of the jailer, who stood surveying his victims with a cruel leer, I experienced a sensation of extreme repugnance. The inner cell was a replica of the outer, only more so, and in the centre was a suggestive depression in the floor, to which a heavily chained criminal drew my attention, with every sign of satisfaction at my evident discomfort. Here was the lower dungeon which was filled up twenty years ago at the instigation of the Russian Tcharikoff, and it was while gazing at this that I realised that bad as is the present there had yet been a state of affairs incomparably worse in the past.

Let me quote the description of this den given by the Russian Khanikoff, who resided in Bokhara for eight months in the 'Forties: "The zindan or dungeon is to the east of the ark, with two compartments: the zindan-i-bala (the upper dungeon) and the zindan-i-poin (the lower dungeon). The latter is a deep pit, at least three fathoms in depth, into which culprits are let down by

ropes; food is lowered down to them in the same manner. The sepulchral dampness of the place in winter as well as in summer is said to be insupportable, according to the testimony of eyewitnesses." Such was the place; imagination will supply the details as to the condition of its victims.

Was this the den where the two Englishman, Stoddart and Conolly, dragged out the last miserable days of their lives? It may be that it was, though the evidence would seem to point to an even more refined chamber of torture within the walls of the citadel itself as the scene of their confinement.

The whole story is one of supreme interest for Englishmen, and I cannot pass from Bokhara without giving in brief outline the facts of the case as far as they have ever been ascertained.

In the year 1826 died Seyid Haydar Tura, Amir of Bokhara, and Hussein Khan reigned in his stead. But Hussein was cursed with a brother, Nasrullah, who had set his heart upon the throne, and after a reign of fifty days the king died—not without suspicion of poison. The summary methods characteristic of Eastern despots now showed themselves in Nasrullah. Omar, who had succeeded the deceased Hussein, was betrayed by his prime minister and cast into prison; thirty of his partisans were instantly put to death, his three remaining brothers expelled from the city and murdered, and a chief of the city hurled to his destruction from the palace gates. Thus was the man who, to quote a recent historian,[1] "epitomised the vices which flourished unchecked in Bokhara," borne through a sea of blood of his own making to the throne which he stained with his presence for a period of thirty-four years.

The cruelty and depravity of his character is attested

[1] Professor E. D. Ross.

by all who had occasion to come into contact with him. Thus the eccentric missionary, Dr Wolff, who had ample opportunity of forming an opinion, wrote that "he delights to hear the people tremble at his name, and laughs with violence when he hears of their apprehensions"; and he throws further light upon the matter when he quotes the remark of a Turkoman that "he (Nasrullah) drank the milk of a man-eater; for the Cossacks in the desert are accused of eating the bodies of dead men, and it is for that reason that he is such a bloodhound." It was an evil hour for Bokhara when the priests gave their sanction to the lust of their king, and from the day when the High Priest caused it to be cried from the house-tops that "the king is the shepherd: the subjects are the sheep. The shepherd may do with the sheep as he thinks proper; he may take the wife from the husband, for the wife is the sheep of the king as well as of her husband, and he may make use of any other man's wife just as he pleases," he plunged into a career of reckless and indescribable debauchery. It is not surprising that such a monster of iniquity should be found indulging in his lust for blood up to the very last, or that the closing scene of his life should display the beheading of his own wife in his presence as he lay upon his deathbed.

Such was the monarch, advised and assisted by his prime minister and brother in iniquity, the inhuman Persian, Abd us-Samad, into whose hands fell the luckless Englishmen, Stoddart and Conolly. Despatched by the Indian Government to enter into negotiations with the ruler of Bokhara, they were treated as the basest of criminals. At length came the rumour of their death. Indignation at the callous behaviour of the Government ran high; and when at length the already-mentioned traveller and missionary, Dr Wolff,

came forward and volunteered to go in person to Bokhara, he met with a ready support. The last authentic news of the condition of the missing officers was supplied by a letter from Captain Conolly to his brother, in which he stated that "for four months they had no change of raiment, their dungeon was in a most filthy and unwholesome state, and teemed with vermin to a degree that rendered life a burden. Stoddart was reduced to a skeleton, and his body was covered with putrid sores."[1] It appears that the first rumours of their death were incorrect, though they were eventually taken from their cell and beheaded in the market-place some time later, and prior to the arrival of their would-be rescuer. "For the quietude of soul," wrote the reverend doctor, "of the friends of those murdered officers, Colonel Stoddart and Captain Conolly, I have to observe that they were both of them cruelly slaughtered at Bokhara, after enduring agonies from confinement in prison of the most awful character—masses of their flesh having been gnawn off their bones by vermin, in 1843."

I have said that the evidence points to a dungeon, no longer existent, but which formerly stood within the walls of the citadel itself, as the scene of their confinement. Let me call to witness the Russian Khanikoff once more: "From hence to the right of the entrance [*i.e.*, of the Ab-Khaneh in the ark] a corridor leads into another prison, more dreadful than the first, called the Kana-Khanah, a name which it has received from the swarms of ticks which infest the place, and are reared there on purpose to plague the wretched prisoners. I have been told that in the absence of the latter some pounds of raw meat are thrown into the pit to keep the ticks alive!" This, then, was the notorious vermin pit, and from Conolly's information

[1] Bokhara. Wolff.

that "their dungeon was in a most filthy and unwholesome state and *teemed with vermin*," and from Wolff's statement that "masses of their flesh had been *gnawn off their bones by vermin*," one is led to the conclusion that it was in this loathsome hole that they dragged out the terrible days of their confinement. Whether it was in the one or the other, however, is after all a matter of small importance—the glaring fact remains that two British officers on official duty were foully done to death without so much as a protest being raised by the Government that had sent them to their doom; and no amount of explanation, had explanation been given, could have wiped out the foul blot which must for ever cast a stain upon the annals of British government.

I have written of Bokhara as I saw it, as any traveller would see it who chanced to visit there to-day, and I have recalled some of those stories which are inseparably connected with its name. I have made no attempt to give any comprehensive description of the town, or to enumerate its mosques and madressahs, or its baths, or its bazaars. All this has been done before, often and well, and any one who is desirous of detailed information concerning them will find it in the works of men so well qualified to give it as Burnes, Wolff, Khanikoff, Vambery, Schuyler, or Lansdell, to mention but a few of those who have written upon the subject. Nor have I amassed statistics of its trade, for such trade is of little interest to Englishmen to-day. Once upon a time Bokhara enjoyed a trade to the amount of 3000 tons a-year with India, importing indigo, tea, and English manufactures along the trade-routes of Afghanistan,[1] but the Transcaspian railway and—to make use of the most euphemistic appellation—a scien-

[1] All the Russias. Henry Norman.

tific tariff have altered all that. To-day there is no room for European merchants other than Russian in those countries which lie immediately north of the Pamirs or the Hindu Kush, where "Russian prints, calicoes, and cottons are successfully competing with the far more beautiful native materials, and hideous brocades from Moscow debauch the instinctive good taste of the East!"[1]

[1] Russia in Central Asia. Lord Curzon.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAMARKAND.

Samarkand one of the great cities of Central Asia—The vicissitudes through which it has passed—Timur's capital—Description of Timur—Samarkand taken by the Russians—A brilliant episode—The buildings of Samarkand—The market square—A meal in the bazaar—The tomb of Tamerlane—The mosque of Bibi Khanum—The mosque of "the living king"—Ishak Khan—The end of the railway.

"SAMARKAND is the face of the earth: Bokhara the marrow of Islam: were there not in Meshed an azure dome the whole world would be merely a ditch for ablution,"—which saying testifies to the honour in which were held the two great cities of Central Asia. For if Bokhara is one of the great names which ring through the history of Central Asia, Samarkand is assuredly the other, the fame of which, suffused with a halo of glory, comes echoing from a remote antiquity down the dim corridors of time.

A large and flourishing city, with walls 70 stadia in circumference when it succumbed to the military genius of Alexander the Great, the victim of the wildest vicissitudes, it passed by fire and sword from one conqueror to another till, adorned and beautified as the capital of Timur, it reached the highest pinnacle of its magnificence. Alexander the Great, Seyid ibn 'Othman, Harthama, Jengis Khan, Tamerlane, and

Baber,—such are the names which stand emblazoned upon the victorious scroll of its conquerors. Small wonder, then, that though the day of its greatness is long passed, it should even in its ruin remain one of the most impressive cities upon earth.

The journey thither from Bokhara is to-day one of the simplest things in the world. You step into the train at midday and you reach Samarkand, if you are lucky, some hours before midnight—how long before depending of course upon the punctuality or lack of it of your train. I arrived at 11 P.M., but then we had started two hours late.

It is, of course, as the immortal capital of Tamerlane that you think of Samarkand to-day, because it is the ruins of the great mosques and madressahs and mausolea which he built, and which merit the application of the encomium of a Persian poet that "even in this broken state they are still better than 100,000 intact ones," which are responsible for its world-wide fame. You may look upon a jumble of insignificant *débris* close by and be told that you are in the precincts of the city of Afrasiab, that hero of ancient myth, "strong as an elephant, whose shadow extended for miles, whose heart was bounteous as the ocean, and his hands like the clouds when rain falls to gladden the earth," or you may pause for a moment to think of the Marcanda that fell to the hero of Macedon; but when you stand before the great buildings which are the glory of Samarkand, it is to their renowned founder that your thoughts are inevitably recalled.

Tamerlane, we are told, was a man of an inordinate ugliness, though enjoying, it would seem, as Cardinal De Retz says of De Bouillon, "with the physiognomy of an ox the perspicacity of an eagle." He was certainly lame, as his name suggests,—Timur leng, Timur the

lame, whence our Tamerlane,—and he was blind in one eye. One day while being waited upon by the barber he chanced to catch sight of himself in the glass, and was so struck by his appearance that he began to weep violently, in which he was joined by his companion Chodscha. At the expiration of two hours the king ceased weeping, but Chodscha then began wailing in good earnest. Timur, surprised, demanded the reason of his renewed lamentation, to whom Chodscha replied, "If thou hast only seen thy face once, and at once seeing hast not been able to contain thyself, but hast wept, what should we do—we who see thy face every day and night!" So say the Persians. It would seem from the above that, as the Persian poet Saadi once said of a compatriot, he was "so ugly and crabbed that a sight of him would derange the ecstasies of the orthodox!" In which respect he resembles another great monarch, who was so adverse to seeing his own likeness that he was at last unwilling that it should appear on his country's coins. Wherefore it is the two-headed eagle of Byzantium that is stamped on the rouble of Russia.

But whatever can be said against Tamerlane on the grounds of his personal appearance, nothing can be said against his success as a conqueror or against his accomplishments as an architect, whereby his city became one of the proudest in the world and the beloved resort a century later of the renowned Sultan Baber.

The city fell into the hands of the Russians under General Kaufmann in May 1868, and was the scene of what has been described as being "one of the brightest and most glorious pages in all the history of the Russian advance in Asia."[1] A small garrison under Major Stempel, left to hold the city by General Kauf-

[1] Turkestan. Schuyler.

BAGHDAD.

"Their vessels that sail down the river to Babylon are circular, and made of leather."—HERODOTUS, Book I. chap. 194.

mann, who had set out with the main army in pursuit of the Amir of Bokhara, found itself surrounded by a hostile force of 20,000 men from Shahrisabs. For five days, during which the greatest heroism was displayed by the beleaguered party, the position remained critical; but at length the one messenger who escaped with his life out of seven who were sent, succeeded in apprising General Kaufmann of the desperate plight of the defenders. No time was lost; the general returned post-haste with his troops, and the enemy were smitten hip and thigh. Thousands of prisoners, we are told, were massacred in cold blood, and the city was given over for three days to pillage.

The city of to-day is, of course, not the city of the fourteenth century, when, embellished by its Tartar king, its glory was at its height; but nevertheless, in spite of the vandalism of Usbeg and Turk, of the shock of earthquakes and of the Russian occupation, its monuments even in their ruin stand unique and whisper faintly of a greatness that is past. The most celebrated buildings are the three stupendous madressahs which form three sides of the Rigistan,—the noblest public square, according to Lord Curzon, in the world,—the mosque of Shah Zindeh, the madressah of Bibi Khanum, the Chinese wife of Timur, and the Gur Amir, or tomb of Tamerlane himself. All these buildings originally were, and to a great extent still are, covered with a network of designs in brilliantly coloured enamel tile-work, presenting a picture of kaleidoscopic beauty in the flashing rays of an Eastern sun.

The three madressahs above alluded to are known, as has been set forth by every writer upon Samarkand, as those of Ulug Beg the grandson of Timur, of Shir Dar the lion-bearing, and of Tillah Kari the gold-plated, and date from the years 1421, 1601, and 1618

respectively. Their massive proportions and grandeur of design compel the gaze and burn a picture upon the tablets of the brain which can never be effaced. Grand, solemn, impressive, are the epithets they conjure up, and all round, in the space which they enclose, the thronging multitudes and noisy booths seem small, puny, inconsequent in comparison.

Yet there is much that attracts here also, when the mind has had its fill of these enduring monuments, and can focus itself upon the trivialities of the present. Seated upon the ground in a corner of this colossal square was a specimen of that strange genus the story-teller of the East. As his voice rose on the still morning air, a little crowd of long-robed gaudy-coloured humanity thronged round him, jostling one another, chattering trivialities, or listening wide-eyed to the speaker's tale. I listened, and, understanding not, took a surreptitious photograph (see illustration), and passed on. A cook-shop suggested food and refreshment. Was there any place where I could lunch? Certainly not. I was pressed for time, and had not delivered my letters of introduction to Russian officials. What did that matter? I was in Rome, and would do as Rome did, so I ate *shashlik* in the bazaar, alternate nobs of mutton and fat roasted on skewers, one skewer to each mouthful, and drank sherbet out of small inconvenient handleless bowls. It was all eminently in keeping with my surroundings, and I would not have had it otherwise.

I feel that I ought to say something about the other striking ruins of Samarkand, though it has all been said far better than I can say it many times before. I visited them all, of course: the tomb of Timur, the mosque of Shah Zindeh, the mosque and madressah of Bibi Khanum, and even a gigantic cenotaph at some

IN THE RIGISTAN, SAMARKAND.

distance from the city, reputed to mark the tomb of Daniel. I mildly suggested that it was Daniyal Bi, of the house of Mangit, who ruled over Bokhara in the eighteenth century that was meant, but was indignantly scoffed at, and informed that it was the prophet Daniel.

In the Gur Amir a vast slab of green jade stands in his memory on the floor above the vault, beneath which the last remains of the great Tamerlane lie. A great crack in the block shows where it was once cut in half by some avaricious khan, I was told, who expected to find treasure inside, though this desecration has also been attributed to Nadir Shah. The two pieces have been joined with cement; but only two years ago the mausoleum was broken into once more, certain tombstones being carried off, and the cenotaph of Timur itself, though not removed, coming in for rough handling.

The gigantic proportions of its arches and dome are perhaps the most striking feature of the great building which bears the name of Bibi Khanum, as is the exquisite tilework of the mosque of Shah Zindeh, the living king. This latter structure was raised by Timur in the year 1323 on the spot where one Kasim Ibn Abbas preached Mohammedanism, and was martyred 1266 years ago. So at least said the Mullah in charge. There was a prophecy that he would appear to defeat the Russians when they came; but, as Mr Schuyler remarks, "Samarkand was occupied, and Shah Zindeh appeared not, so that his fame has of late somewhat fallen off."[1] Nevertheless, it is still supposed that Shah Zindeh will come again when the triumph of Islam shall have extended to the uttermost ends of the earth.

[1] Turkestan. Schuyler.

Of quite another kind is the interest which attaches to Samarkand as the home of Ishak Khan, pretender to the Afghan throne, and compulsory guest of his Russian hosts. The feelings of the small party of Russian officers who were inspecting land on the Oxus banks at the time of the death of the late Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, himself a former refugee at the same city, must have been of a mixed description when the rumour reached them that Ishak had escaped. Happily the rumour proved untrue, and Ishak still lingers at Samarkand.

Beyond here the railway penetrates to Andijan, in the heart of the cotton country, passing by Tchernayevo, Khokand, and Marghilan, and from Tchernayevo a branch runs north to Tashkent, the capital of Turkestan, and for the time being terminus of a railway which has played a part in the pacification of the wild peoples of Central Asia, the development of their country, and the consolidating of the Russian power, which may well surpass even the sanguine hopes of its enterprising promoter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ACROSS THE STEPPES OF TURKESTAN.

A Russian capital in Asia—Old Tashkent—Its capture by the Russians—Railway projects—The Tashkent-Orenburg line—The Tomsk-Tashkent line—Advantages of post-roads—Carriages purchased—Method of travelling—A post-house—Rate of speed attainable—The steppes of Turkestan—The life of the steppe—Tchimkent—The Chinese frontier—Through Semirechensk—The Siberian frontier—Monotony of travel—The character of the steppe borderland—Semipalatinsk—From Semipalatinsk to Barnaul—Reach Barnaul.

WHEN one speaks of Tashkent at the present day, one refers to a modern Russian town with a population of between 40,000 and 50,000, which has not yet seen its fortieth anniversary. Broad, airy streets, with channels of running water and avenues of tall poplar-trees, behind which rise rows of well-built houses and excellent shops, everywhere meet the eye; while shady public gardens, an imposing-looking college, where, among other accomplishments, the rising generation are taught the English tongue, and an excellent Government House, which has sheltered men with names writ large in the records of Russian expansion in Asia, and where now, beloved and respected by all around him, General Ivanoff resides in his capacity of Governor-General of the vast district of Turkestan, further serve to apprise

one that he has reached a capital and centre of administration.[1]

Adjoining the modern town is the old Tashkent of 100,000 inhabitants, close to which rise the earthern ramparts of the old fort stormed and captured by General Tchernaieff in 1865—the ardent general having carefully omitted to read the despatch from Tsar Alexander II. forbidding him to attack the city until after he had captured it!—and now occupied by Russian soldiers; but, unlike Bokhara or Samarkand, it can boast of no historic buildings or mosques and madressahs of special note, so that, as I have said, it is of the chief town of a Russian province that one thinks when mention is made of Tashkent. For similar reasons there is little to be found there of any great interest for the traveller; and after the best part of a week spent at the chief *numera*—the very moderate substitute for a hotel which is to be found in the chief Russian towns in Asia—owing to unavoidable delay in obtaining the conveyances necessary for my further journey, I was glad enough to take my leave of the capital and to start on my journey once more. I should, however, be guilty of gross ingratitude were I to fail to acknowledge before leaving the kindness and hospitality of the Russian officials whose acquaintance I was fortunate enough to make. Should these lines ever chance to meet the eye of the gentleman to whose genial company are due my pleasantest recollections of Tashkent, may he read in them the sincere, though wholly inadequate, expression of gratitude of a wanderer in a strange land.

For the present, unless you wish to return the way

[1] It may be of interest to the advocates of afforestation to learn that since the Russian occupation, when trees—poplars and Turkestan elms—were largely planted, the rainfall has increased by 250 per cent.

A STREET IN OLD TASHKENT.

you came—*i.e.*, along the Transcaspian railway—you must give yourself up to the tender mercies of the tarantass and the post-road. I say for the present, because the railways which Russia has built in Asia in the course of the last twenty-five years will ere long be increased by lines which will connect her vast territories in Central Asia with European Russia on the one hand and with the great Trans-Siberian railway system on the other.

The first of the two great lines of railway which she has in view is the Tashkent-Orenburg line, to be completed by January 1 (14), 1905. Running north from Tashkent to Tchimkent, and thence north-west *vid* Turkestan to Orenburg, where it will join the railway system of European Russia, it will cover in all a distance of 1600 versts, or 1056 miles. It will be seen that, in constructing this line, Russia is merely giving material shape to her original scheme of a railway to Central Asia, the project, that is, which was officially reported upon in 1873, and vigorously advocated by General Kaufmann, the Governor of Tashkent at that time, and which was taken up with feverish energy in the more grandiose guise of an overland route to India by the indefatigable de Lesseps, long before the present Transcaspian railway had even been thought of. The large outlay which it was at that time recognised would be necessary to construct and maintain a railway across many hundred miles of unpopulated and unproductive steppe no longer appears to constitute an obstacle to its construction, while the objection to the line on the grounds of its becoming a damaging rival to the Ivanscaspian railway seems to have disappeared, or at any rate to have been overruled, since it is now well on the road to completion. The necessity of bringing water from a distance has proved a source of difficulty and

delay at the Tashkent end of the line, where 130 versts had been finished at the time of my visit, while I was informed that at the Orenburg end a distance of 200 versts had been completed and was ready for traffic.[1]

The second great line which is being discussed is that known as the Tomsk-Tashkent line, which will follow the direction of the post-road over which I travelled *viâ* Tchimkent, Verni, Semipalatinsk, and Barnaul, whence it is suggested that it should make a bend in order to take in the government coal and iron mines at Salaiire. From here a branch would be built to Kunetzsk, and the main line would have its junction with the Siberian system at the station of Polonoshnaya. It is not proposed, however, to embark upon this line until the Tashkent-Orenburg line is finished, when the Minister of Finance has promised the scheme his serious consideration. I may point out, that in addition to the obvious strategic importance of such lines, they will possess the further advantage of putting the valuable cotton-growing lands of Ferghana into close touch with the great corn-growing districts of Siberia,[2] and then, when no apprehension need be felt

[1] A telegram from Orenburg at the end of June of the present year (1904) states that the navvying work on the section of the line linking the northern and southern stretches is approaching completion, and that 900 versts of the line have already been successfully laid from the Orenburg end, while 540 have been laid from the Tashkent end. Passenger trains run twice a-week from Orenburg to Aktiubinsk, and, adds the telegram, in a few days' time the railway will be opened to "commercial" traffic between Tashkent and Perovsk.

[2] The system of charges on Russian railways, whether for passengers or goods, is known as the zone system, which necessarily favours long journeys, the charges for long distances being relatively much lower than those for short ones. To such an extent did this system favour the corn-growers of Siberia, that it was found necessary, in the case of the Siberian railway, to break the tariff at Cheliabinsk, to prevent an outbreak among the farmers of the Volga basin, owing to the market being upset by the low

on the score of famine, and the whole of the lands of Ferghana can consequently be given up to the production of cotton, Russia will be on the highroad to realising one of her ambitions—namely, to supply from her own dominions the whole of the increasing demand of those cotton factories which have sprung up in recent years to make Moscow a modern manufacturing city.

Until these lines are built, however, recourse must be had to the post-roads to carry one over the huge expanse of steppe-land of Turkestan and Southern Siberia. Let me try and give some idea of what travelling on a post-road in Asia is like.

First, if, as in my case, you have much baggage, it is advisable to purchase vehicles for yourself and your belongings. For any one travelling light these can be found at each post-station; but if not, unpacking and packing up the baggage involves much trouble and delay, and it is better to have your own. I bought a tarantass and another cart of similar construction for £10 apiece, and, as I subsequently drove close upon 2500 miles in them, consider that they were cheap at the price. The tarantass is not an ideal carriage for comfort, being possessed neither of seats nor of springs;

prices of Siberian corn. The system is explained by Vladimir in his 'Russia on the Pacific':—

"The price of tickets on Russian railways is charged per verst only up to a distance of 300 versts; greater distances are charged according to zone,

of 25 versts	for distances	from	301	to	500 versts.
30	"	"	501	"	710 "
35	"	"	711	"	990 "
40	"	"	991	"	1510 "

For distances above 1510 versts, the zones are of 50 versts. Above 325 versts the price of each zone is 20 kopecks third class, 30 kopecks second, and 50 kopecks first class. As the zones increase, the cost therefore relatively decreases: thus to travel 1000 versts (over 660 English miles), from 1510 to 2510 versts in first, second, and third class, costs respectively 10, 6, and 4 roubles."

but, like everything else, to get used to it is merely a matter of time. I frequently travelled day and night, and found that with a little practice I was even able to sleep tolerably well.

The recognised method of travelling is with the troïka—three horses abreast—and the charge is 3 kopecks per horse per verst (a fraction over a penny a mile) in Turkestan and 1½ kopecks in Siberia, with an additional payment of 10 kopecks per horse per stage, as government dues. The post-houses exist at intervals of from 15 to 30 versts—say 10 to 20 miles—and are quite innocent of any attraction. A room with a screen or partition, behind which will be found a hard couch, or sometimes, at the larger stations, two rooms with bare whitewashed walls, form the accommodation which awaits the traveller. A huge stove built into the wall is the feature of the furniture, the remainder being made up of a table, bench—sofa is too euphemistic a term—and two or three chairs. The bareness of the whitewashed walls is in every case accentuated by coloured prints of the Tsar and Tsarina, a photograph of the governor-general of the province, a few sets of rules and regulations in black wooden frames, and the inevitable ikon. Occasionally to these adornments was added an advertisement proclaiming the excellence of the MacCormick reaper and other agricultural implements manufactured by that company. In the rooms which form the remainder of the house live the postmaster and his wife and family. Nothing is obtainable except eggs, milk, and hot water—the samovar is found everywhere—and, unless you happen to arrive at a post-house when the postmaster is taking his daily meal of broth, you must live on tea and eggs, supplemented by such provisions as your forethought may have prompted you to bring with you.

A RUSSIAN POST-ROAD IN ASIA.

"This low rate of speed being due chiefly to the badness of the road."—Page 205.

The rate of speed attainable varies according to circumstances. If you are a Russian official you travel fast, for both postmaster and driver stand in awe of officialdom, and you have preference over ordinary travellers in the matter of horses. One gentleman in an official position told me that before the days of the railway in Siberia he once travelled 1000 versts (660 miles) in forty-eight hours! And a lady, the wife of an official, travelled from Verni to the Chinese frontier, a distance of 237 miles, in thirty-five consecutive hours, while I was at Kulja. My own rate of speed, however, rose little above an average of 100 versts a-day, horses being scarce in parts, and long dreary waits at the miserable post-houses frequent. Thus I find that I occupied thirteen days and two hours in driving from Tashkent to Kulja, a distance of 1224¼ versts, or 808 miles, of which time 124½ hours were spent waiting for horses at various post-stations, including a wait of 17½ hours at Verni while my passports were undergoing examination. Allowing a further average wait of an hour at each post-station while horses were being changed, meals taken, and, as was often the case, the conveyances being repaired, I was on the move for 133½ hours, which gives an average speed while actually travelling of a fraction over six miles an hour; this low rate of speed being due chiefly to the badness of the road and to the slow progress we made at nights. I remember reaching a post-station one evening with both carriages in urgent need of repairs. On arrival I immediately requested the postmaster to send for the blacksmith. "Very good," he replied; "I will bring him if he is not drunk!" I suppose he was—it was Sunday evening—as nothing was done till next morning.

The country which one traverses is possessed of a

terrible monotony. Day after day the far-reaching steppes of Turkestan spread out their carpet of luxuriant grass before one, splashed here and there with patches of brilliant colour, formed by masses of poppies and magnificent tulips; but it is only at long intervals, where a settlement has grown up round a post-station, that trees or houses appear to give any variety to the uninterrupted landscape. Ranges of mountains are always visible to the south, now nearer, now farther away—at first the Alexandrovski Mountains, and farther on the spurs of the Alatau; and looking out to the right after passing Verni, you might imagine that you were gazing at the Grampians, until a glance to the other side dispels the illusion—there is no room in Scotland for the endless expanse which here meets the eye.

Sometimes you see in the distance collections of what you take to be trim little hay-cocks, until a nearer acquaintance apprises you of the fact that they are Kirgiz *yurts*, the curious tents of grey felt, stretched over wooden frames, in which these nomads live. At others you meet long strings of camels carrying away a whole village of *yurts* on their backs, a desire for change having prompted their owners to seek new lands and pastures for their flocks. Indeed, camels were the beasts most in evidence—they were even being used in the plough in one or two places; but large flocks of sheep, droves of cattle, and herds of horses are also to be seen, though hardly in the quantities one would expect in so magnificent a pastoral country. In addition to the Kirgiz, one may see long lines of wooden carts moving along at funereal pace, or outspanned by the roadside—Russian emigrants these, seeking new homes and fortunes in the East.

After leaving Tashkent, the road runs north for a distance of seventy-six miles to Tchimkent, stormed by

the combined forces of Colonels Tchernaieff and Verefkin in the days of the Russian advance, and then turns east, passing through the small towns of Aulie Ata and Pishpek to Verni, now a considerable town grown up round the original fort constructed in 1854 between Lakes Balkash and Issi Kul, distant from Tashkent 509 miles. The old fort still stands at Tchimkent, and made an impressive picture as I gazed at it in the grey light of dawn from the vicinity of the post-house. There is a story of a curious mistake which led to its capture by the Russians. A soldier who had been slightly wounded at the beginning of the operations called out for the surgeon, "Dok-tu-ra." His comrades, hearing only "u-ra!"—the Russian hurrah—flung themselves to the assault, and carried the citadel with a loss of only five men.[1]

After leaving Verni the road turns north to the Ili river, which it crosses 555 miles from Tashkent, and then north-east into the mountainous country on the east of Semirechensk—the land of seven rivers. At Altin Imel, a small station 632 miles from Tashkent, the road to the Chinese frontier at Khorgos branches off, and after passing the frontier proceeds to the Chinese town of Kulja, 62 miles farther on, and 808 miles from Tashkent.

Of the chequered history in recent years of this remote appanage of the "Son of Heaven," and of its present position, I shall have something to say in a subsequent chapter, omitting to do so now in order that, for the sake of convenience, I may here complete the sketch of my journey along the post-road.

From Altin Imel, then, you travel on northwards through mountainous country for some distance, passing the small town of Kopala, a short distance beyond

[1] See Schuyler's Turkestan, vol. ii. p. 75.

which you emerge on to the level plains east of Lake Balkash. Here a stretch of sandy desert is crossed, where the various scrub and herb life which one learns to look for in sandy soil take the place of grass; but after the zone of sand is passed the scene again presents the same grass-covered treeless expanse which has accompanied you the whole way. The last town in Turkestan is Sergiopol, and 17 miles farther on, and 1003 from Tashkent, the frontier of Siberia is reached. The next 160 miles, as far as the town of Semipalatinsk, are perhaps the most dreary of the whole journey, if, indeed, it is possible to discriminate in such a country. I often drove 20 miles at a stretch without seeing a sign of life beyond an occasional vulture soaring high overhead, or sitting brooding on a telegraph-pole, and I was consequently not in the least surprised to learn that the population of Semipalatinsk averages only 1·7 to the square verst. The intense monotony of journeying across a country such as this can easily be conceived. As hour after hour went by, the quaint refrain of one of Whyte-Melville's songs thumped and hammered through my brain, keeping exaggerated time with the perpetual jolts and bumps of my crazy carriage:—

"Next came the Moor-land,
The Moor-land, the Moor-land—
Next came the Moor-land,
It stretched for many a mile."

Substitute Steppe-land for Moor-land, and you have an exact presentation of the scene.

The soil, as in other parts of the Siberian steppe border-land, varies from fertile black earth to sands, clay, gypsum, marl, and salt marshes, with a flora characterised by dwarf bushes, often thorny and sometimes covered with grey foliage, dwarf almond, wild

A BROKEN BRIDGE ON THE POST-ROAD.

cherry, hawthorn, and saxsaul, while among the herbaceous vegetation wormwood, willow-herb, feather-grass, and reeds are conspicuous. Agriculture is hopelessly handicapped by the climatic conditions: want of rain and irrigation, the high temperature which is usual by the end of May, sand-storms which sweep across the plain in summer, and blizzards which devastate the country in winter. Industrial development in so thinly populated a country is naturally insignificant, and the rearing of live-stock, being the only form of husbandry to which the land is suited, forms the chief occupation of its people. So vast is the country and so scattered the population that one observes no great quantity of cattle as one travels through it, but, according to statistics compiled a few years ago, there were upwards of three million head of live-stock in the Semipalatinsk district, of which more than half consisted of sheep, the remainder being made up of horses, cattle, camels, and goats.

At last a thin line of trees becomes visible, marking the course of the Irtish river, and the roofs and spires of Semipalatinsk rise on the horizon. After what one has become accustomed to for days, the town seems almost magnificent; but its magnificence is comparative. There are a few good houses of brick, and the churches and cathedrals, with their whitewashed exteriors and green cupolas and gilded spires, produce a certain effect; but the large majority of the houses are small and built of wood, and the whole population does not exceed 30,000. The ground all round is flat and sandy, and the climate liable to be unpleasantly hot in summer and intensely cold in winter.

The few shops are tolerably well supplied with European goods, thanks to the communication with Omsk on the Siberian railway afforded by the Irtish

river, down which steamers ply twice a-week during the summer, when the river is not frozen. In the winter communication is maintained with the same place by a post-road 479½ miles in length. Alabaster is found near the town, and some years ago very rich beds of manganese were discovered not far off in the Arkalik Mountains, though this is but a small item of the vast mineral wealth that abounds in these remote dominions of the Tsar.

North of Semipalatinsk I found the country much more populous,—large villages of log-built houses at the end of every stage and sometimes in between, trees growing in many places, especially along the river-banks, and the country altogether presenting a more promising appearance. I had in fact reached one of the most fertile tracts of Siberia, whose possibilities are enormous; but let me at once say that I was not very greatly impressed with the settlers there. They struck me as being rude, uneducated peasants,—even the master of the post-horses could seldom read or write, a clerk as a rule being attached to the post-station for this purpose,—and hardly the stamp of men to found a colony. They may be a degree more enlightened than the Cossacks, who were the first settlers in these territories; but that is not saying a great deal, and I do not think that there is much chance of the most being made of this country of magnificent possibilities by its present occupants.

Three hundred and eleven miles beyond Semipalatinsk and 1542 beyond Tashkent stands Barnaul, the capital of one of the districts of the Tomsk Government; but some account of this and of the adjoining districts of Biisk and Zeminogorsk, whose development is so intimately connected with the Siberian railway, will be better reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER XIX.

KULJA.

Yakub Khan—Internal disorder in Kulja in the 'Sixties—Russian interference—A ghastly holocaust—Report of a Chinese official—Russian assurances—Tso-Chungt-'ang, a Chinee of "great steadfastness of purpose"—The reconquest of Turkestan by China—Difficulties with Russia—Gordon summoned—The treaty of St Petersburg—What Russia gained—The position of Kulja to-day—Suidon—Kulja—Mineral wealth of the province—Tribes, sedentary and nomadic—Kirgiz and Kalmuk—The Chinese quarter—A visit to the Taotai—The future of Kulja—Russian intrigue with Tibet.

I MUST now retrace my steps for a moment to the Chinese province of Kulja. Like most parts of Central Asia, Kulja has enjoyed a chequered career, and has been the scene in modern times of at least its fair share of Eastern disorder and intrigue. While Yakub Khan, after raising his master to the throne of Khokand and then deposing him in his own favour, was parading himself before the Central Asian world in the character of the "Athalik Ghazi" or "Champion Father," the seeds of dissension, which he had so successfully fostered, spread north of the Thian Shan, where, thanks to the juxtaposition of rival creeds and conflicting interests, the flame of rebellion was soon fanned into a very tolerable conflagration.

The thread which runs through the tale of massacre and strife, which fills up the page of history devoted to

Kulja in the 'Sixties, is to be traced in the antagonism existing between the Mohammedans and the Chinese, though often obscured, it must be admitted, beneath a cloud of intrigue and civil strife among the parties themselves, carrying with it its inevitable concomitant of bloodshed and atrocity. For a time the Russians preserved the attitude of interested spectators along the border-line of their recently acquired territories; but the time at length came when it appeared to them that their turn for creating a diversion had arrived. Marauders were plying their trade along the borders with unabashed audacity, while the stormy petrel, Yakub Khan, was engaged in a promising war against the Dungans—the descendants of a race settled in very early times in the provinces of Han-su and Shen-si, Chinese in all save religion—of Urumtsi and Turfan, which would in all probability result in his eventual occupation of Kulja. So wrote the Russian officials, determined on acquisition, in a specious despatch to St Petersburg.

An affray between a Russian outpost and a body of Tarantchis—Mohammedan natives of Kulja—presented an opportune excuse for an immediate advance, and in the course of eleven days an army of 4000 Tarantchis had been defeated, two cities occupied, the submission of the Tarantchi sultan accepted, and the capital entered by General Kolpakofsky.

But the Tarantchis were determined upon one final holocaust, and, despite the proximity of the Russians, succeeded in drenching the grave of their supremacy in a veritable sea of blood. Enraged at the surrender of their chief, they fell upon the wretched Dungans and Chinese in the city and its neighbourhood, and massacred upwards of 2000 of them in the course of a single night, no less than 500 corpses being found next morning in a

canal in the precincts of the city. The Chinese official Lu-tsu-han, in a report written for his Government, which fell, however, into the hands of the Russians, says: "There were many instances that in lonely places they actually caught Mantchus and Chinese and killed them. Happily Heaven did not permit the human race to end. Now the leader of the great Russian empire, the Dzian-Dziun of Semiretch, with his army inspired with humanity and truth, has quieted every one. This petty foreign Power (Russia!) saved the nation from fire and water, it subdued the whole four countries without the least harm, so that children are not frightened, and the people submitted not without delight and ecstasy!"[1]

How vastly more entertaining would our own consular reports be, were they permeated by a similar sense of humour!

The Russian expedition was an undoubted success, and had, therefore, to be approved by the statesmen on the Neva, who were in reality far from pleased at these further acquisitions and consequent responsibilities. The Government at Peking were informed of the occupation, and assured of the readiness of the Russian Government to restore the province to its rightful owners, as soon as a Chinese force of sufficient strength to occupy and preserve order in the district should arrive.

For once China showed herself capable of a determined and wholly unexpected fixity of purpose. Tso-Chungt-'ang, the general to whom the task of reconquering Turkestan was delegated, was a man, as Professor Douglas remarks, "of proved ability and of great steadfastness of purpose." Before him stretched a dreary waste, dotted at distant and lonely intervals by small

[1] Schuyler's Turkestan, vol. ii. p. 188.

oases; beyond again lay Turkestan. With a contempt for time, which was as delightful as it was characteristic, but with an altogether unlooked-for tenacity, the general embarked upon his task. His soldiers became husbandmen, the land was ploughed, seed was sown, and in due season crops were reaped, and the danger of famine thus averted—hey, presto! the Celestial farmers became the soldiers of the green banner once more, and the expedition resumed its way.

The result was a complete success. Urumtsi and Manas soon fell—not without hideous slaughter in the case of the latter: the notorious Yakub was compelled to fly: Aksu, Yarkand, Kashgar, and Khoten capitulated, and by the year 1878 the task of conquest had been completed.

Seven years, however, had elapsed since the occupation of Kulja by Russia, who was no longer in a mood to restore the lost property without ample remuneration, and a leisurely diplomatic duel ensued. A treaty concluded at Livadia by the Chinese official Chunghou —the same that had been sent to France in 1871 to apologise for the massacre of sixteen French sisters of charity at Tientsin—so incensed the Court at Peking that it was immediately repudiated, and its unfortunate author handed over to the tender mercies of the Board of Punishments, while Gordon of imperishable fame was called in to lend the lustre of his reputation as stiffening for a Chinese army to be hurled against the might of Russia. His mission was rendered abortive by his repeated declaration on his way to the capital of his intention to induce China to make peace—the very last thing for which he had been summoned; and eventually the question, after dragging its tedious length along the obscure channels of oriental diplomacy and intrigue, found a solution in the treaty of St Petersburg, con-

cluded in February of the year 1881, with the assistance and advice of the British Government, by the Marquis Tseng.

With regard to the treaty, it must be observed that, however much the authorities at St Petersburg may have declared themselves opposed to the action of their subordinates on the spot in 1871, and however loud their protestations of their readiness to restore the province to its rightful owners, they did not hesitate to make the most of the advantageous position in which they found themselves in 1881. The western half of the country remains Russian to this day. Nine million metallic roubles were paid by China for the restoration of the eastern half. The towns in which Russia had the right of appointing consuls were added to, and the exclusive rights of navigating the rivers of Manchuria, accorded to the subjects of Russia and China by the treaty of Aigun (1858), were confirmed.

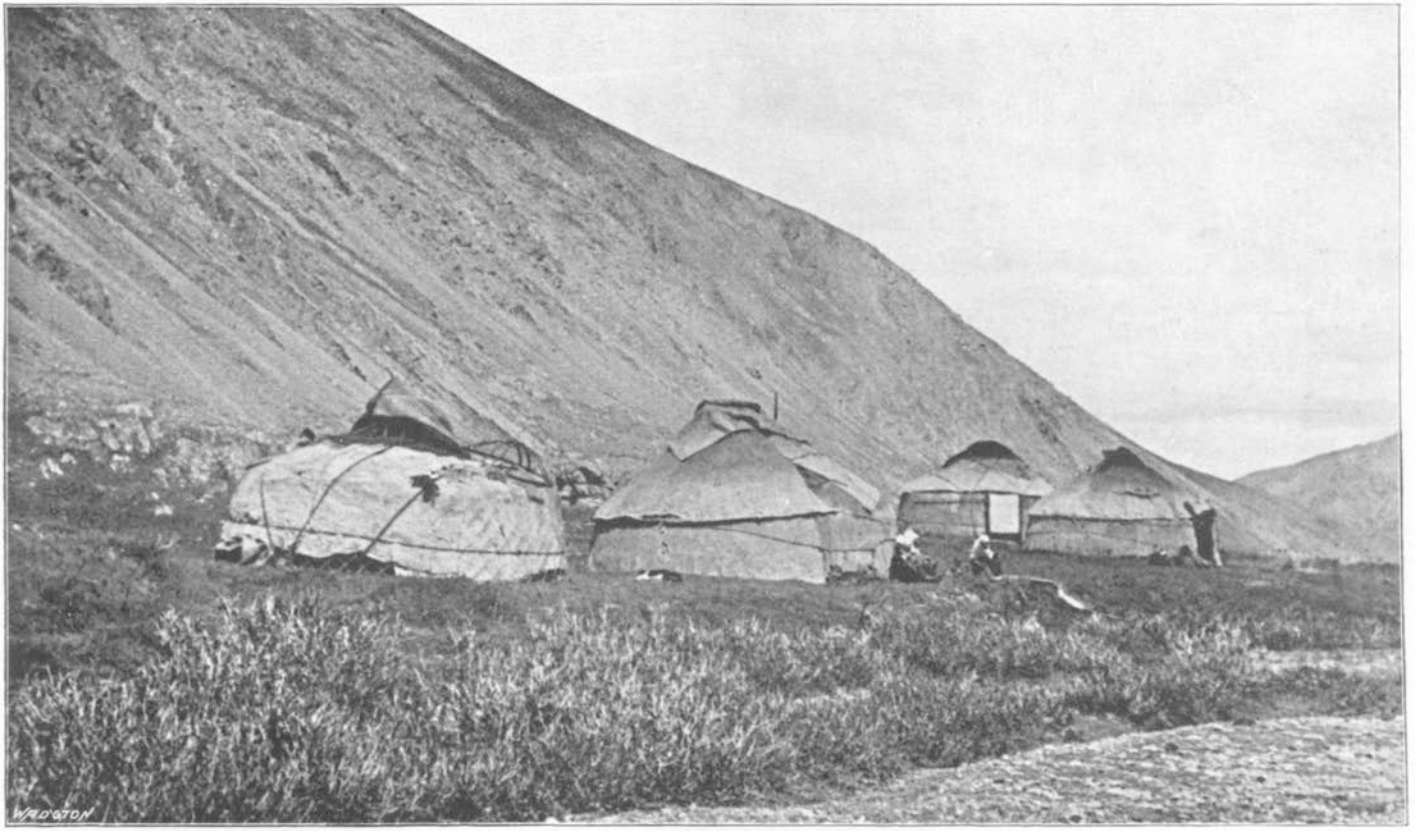
The position of Kulja to-day—Chinese in name, Russian the moment it pleases her that it should be so in fact—is the natural outcome of the proceedings already recorded, which culminated in the above treaty. After crossing the frontier you very soon receive intimation of your having entered the dominions of the "Son of Heaven," for the road leads through a walled enclosure —the Chinese custom-house, where you dismount while a Chinese scribe traces incomprehensible hieroglyphics on your passport. Forty versts farther on you come to Suidon, once an important place as the seat where that high official the governor-general of Chinese Turkestan held court, and kept his soldiers and his guns and all his munitions of war. When the Russian came, however, and built his post-road and his Cossack post, Chinese exclusiveness rebelled; but, being unable to oust the "foreign devil," retired a few miles into the

wilderness and built a new Suidon, where he now reigns sheltered from foreign curiosity.

The town of Kulja itself affords an unmistakable illustration of the status of the province. Russian reality is there in the shape of a Russian consul and a Cossack escort, a Russian post and telegraph office, and the insurmountable fact that half the inhabitants of the town are Russian subjects, while the dignity and prestige of the Son of Heaven are ostentatiously displayed in the person of a Taotai or provincial governor, and the whole gamut of minor officials and hangers-on.

I spent some days in the town of Kulja itself, and had an opportunity of seeing something of the surrounding country. The town is situated on the Ili river, which here flows through a broad and fertile valley enclosed by parallel ranges of handsome mountains. There is no doubt that these mountains are possessed of considerable mineral wealth. Coal is found not very far off, and is worked, as far as I could gather, in a desultory way by any one who feels inclined to go so far to gather his supply of fuel. I was also told by some of the nomad tribes that they found gold; but this fact they kept sedulously hidden from the authorities at Kulja, for they said, "if the Chinese knew that there was gold in the mountains, they would make us work it for them, and we should never receive any of the profits for ourselves." As it is, when these nomads are in want of a little money, they send one of their number down to Kulja to dispose of a nugget of gold in the bazaar. If any questions are asked, the individual replies that his father has died and left him a family ornament (the gold) which has been in his family for generations, but which he is obliged to dispose of for want of funds.

The population in the vicinity of Kulja itself consists



KIRGIZ YURTS.

chiefly of Tarantchis living in villages of mud houses, and resembling the Turkish races of Central Asia rather than the Chinese. In other parts — in the Tekkes valley, for instance, higher up the river—the population is composed exclusively of nomads, Kirgiz and Kalmuks, living in villages of felt tents. Both peoples are of Mongol origin and both lead the life of nomads, herding and pasturing their flocks; but while the Kalmuks have retained their connection with their ancestors both in appearance and religion, the Kirgiz have drifted apart, disdaining to wear a pig-tail, and practising, in name at least, the precepts of the Koran.

I had occasion more than once to spend the night in a Kirgiz or Kalmuk *yurt*, and found them exceedingly comfortable. I remember one in particular, the property of the headman of a Kirgiz village, which was an excellent abode. Thick felts were spread on the ground, and warm carpets over these. On one side were couches of rugs and cushions, boxes containing the family possessions, and the simple household utensils in daily use. In the centre, on the ground, blazed a cheerful fire; and opposite us, on the far side, huge hunks of horse-flesh were hanging from the roof. My host possessed large herds of horses, amounting to 4000, while his father, who had died two years before, had at one time been the owner of as many as 10,000. I doubt if the remarks made by Stumm in description of the Kirgiz whom he met farther west, that "meat is only eaten on holidays and at banquets in the very severe cold of winter, or on an extraordinary occasion, when perhaps some old or maybe sick camel or horse is found in the camp which is of no further service for transport purposes,"[1] would be applicable to the Kirgiz of Ili. One of the favourite drinks of these nomads, not only here

[1] Russia in Central Asia. Herr Stumm.

but in parts of Siberia as well, is *kumiss* or mare's milk, which is supposed to be extremely nourishing and invigorating, and is considered very good, though I am bound to say that, speaking from personal experience, I should think that the taste, as far as Europeans are concerned, must be an acquired one. Another beverage is made by distilling milk, the result being a colourless liquid of no very pronounced or inviting flavour.

The Kirgiz women were bright and hospitable, and, though Mohammedans, did not cover the face in the presence of a stranger, but, on the contrary, welcomed me and entertained me hospitably. Primogeniture appears to be unknown, but a system of tenure, somewhat similar to that known as *borough-English*, is in vogue, the youngest son remaining at home, and at his father's death inheriting his fortune.

To return to the town of Kulja itself. The race variety here is considerable. You may in the course of a single morning see Kalmuks and Kirgiz come in to make purchases in the bazaar; Russians on official duty, Sarts and Tartar merchants in pursuit of trade, Chinese Mohammedans, and, lastly, the true Chinese, living together in one quarter of the town. Here you may stroll through the Chinese bazaar and see the Chinaman as he is. Little groups of pig-tailed individuals are loitering about, eating odd messes at the cooking shops with still odder-looking chop-sticks, and drinking everlasting cups of tea. Huge streamers covered with strange hieroglyphics hanging in front of the shops tell of the goods to be obtained within—birds' nests and jelly-fish, and a hundred other delicacies dear to the Celestial soul; trinkets and furs, and the huge spectacles of dark-coloured crystal affected by the Chinaman, together with a heterogeneous collection of Chinese manufactured goods.

Of course I called on the Taotai, or Chinese provincial governor. Passing through gateways and courtyards emblazoned with representations of fearful demons, dragons, and antediluvian monsters of the most approved type, I reached the hall of audience. I found the Taotai a delightful, fat, good-natured Chinaman, whose large round face was suffused with a perennial smile. Delicacies of all sorts were placed before us, which he of course ate with chop-sticks, though he was thoughtful enough to provide his barbarian guest with a two-pronged fork. Whenever any morsel, in any of the many dishes, struck him as being of specially enticing appearance, he seized it with his fingers and placed it on my plate—the high-water mark of Chinese politeness.

Later in the day he returned my call. The procession was delightful. First walked a Chinaman in scarlet, holding up an enormous scarlet umbrella, the emblem of officialdom. Then came various retainers on foot and on horseback, clothed in scarlet and purple, with enormous soup plates embroidered on their backs; and last came the Taotai himself, in the most extraordinary little Chinese cart, drawn, as is customary, by a mule.

As to the future, Kulja has every prospect of remaining *in statu quo* for many years to come. Russia has nothing to gain by an immediate advance in this direction, and, moreover, she was careful to see that the province was at her mercy before she withdrew under the treaty of 1881. The mineral wealth is there in the earth, and is likely to remain there, for China will most assuredly not develop it herself, and Russia has enough, and more than enough, undeveloped mineral wealth in Siberia and elsewhere to keep her occupied for many a year to come. There are, besides,

other gateways into the land of old Cathay, which hold out greater attractions than does the road through Kulja. Mongolia is, no doubt, for the most part, a land of singular unattractiveness; but the shortest and most direct and most practicable route from Russia to Peking lies across the level stretches of the Gobi Desert. Urga, the most important town in all Mongolia, is dominated by and permeated by the leavening Russian yeast, and plans and surveys have been made for a line from the Siberian railway to Peking *viâ* Kiachta, Urga, and Kalgan.[1] To the south, again, the mystery-enshrouded highlands of Tibet hold out irresistible inducements to international flirtation and intrigue, and evidence has been sufficiently apparent of late that the Russian bear is by no means insensible to the charms of coquetting with the hierarch of the Mecca of Central Asian Buddhism. The mission from Tibet under the able guidance of the Siberian Buriat Dorjieff, which arrived at Odessa in October 1900, and was received by the Tsar himself at Livadia a short time after, cannot be regarded as a mere pleasure-trip, undertaken at the fancy of pleasure-seeking officials; nor are the subsequent Tibetan mission to St Petersburg, bearing an autograph letter from the supreme pontiff of Lhassa to the Tsar of Russia, or the expedition of the Russianised Buriat, Professor Tsybikoff, to the Tibetan capital, or the fact that rifles bearing the stamp of the Russian Government factory of Tula were found on the bodies of the Tibetans who fell in the recent onslaught against the Indian political

[1] I was informed by a Russian official that the construction of this line had been decided on, the 850 miles through Mongolia from Kiachta to Kalgan to be built by Russia, and the remaining section from Kalgan to Peking by China.

BUDDHISTS OF CENTRAL ASIA.

mission in the Chumbi valley, devoid of a distinct significance.[1]

The southern regions of Chinese Turkestan, while as much probably at the mercy of Russia as the less important province of Kulja, have the supreme attraction, not possessed by the latter, of lying in contact with the semi-independent States which border upon the Indian Empire; and the possibility of controlling what Mr Chirol describes as "a great politico-religious organisation, whose influence can and does make itself appreciably felt all along the north-eastern borderland of India," is far more likely to appeal to the imagination of the chauvinist statesmen of Russia than an advance into a part of the Chinese Empire which could scarcely be deemed either necessary or advantageous, as likely to lead, for the present at any rate, to any further advancement in a policy of territorial aggrandisement and acquisition.

[1] The following passage from Prince Ukhtomski's account of the travels of the Tsesarievitch in the East, is of considerable interest in this connection. Speaking of the Buddhists in Russia he says: "Every year thousands of them go on pilgrimage to Mongolia and to the centres of Tibetan learning. Pioneers of Russian trade and Russian good fame, representatives of the Russian name in the depths of the yellow East, are these simple little men in their worn garments, with their shaggy little horses and their camels. These nameless natives march on to . . . the mysterious Tashe-Llunpo and the highlands adjoining India, with as much ease and briskness as we do in our suburban excursions. Everywhere this intelligent element . . . quietly bears into this Asiatic wilderness ideas of the White Tsar and the Muscovite people. . . . These sturdy travellers bear also the idea, vague as yet, that the Christian West is called on to regenerate through us the effete civilisation of the East. Scarce any one in Russia guesses as yet what a valuable work is being carried on by the modest Russian Lamaites, at a distance of hundreds of miles from the Russian frontier."

SPORT

A DIGRESSION

"The days spent in the chase are not counted in the length of life."—*Arab proverb.*

"They are the most voracious people of prey that ever existed. The more vigorous run out of the island to Europe, to America, to Asia, to Africa and Australia, to hunt with fury by gun, by trap, by harpoon, by lasso, with dog, with horse, with elephant or with dromedary, all the game that is in nature."—EMERSON, *English Traits.*

CHAPTER XX.

AMONG THE IBEX OF TURKESTAN.

A sportsman's paradise—The way there—A lengthy bargain—To the Oriyaas valley—Magnificent scenery—A Kalmuk Nimrod—A 48-inch ibex shot—Stormy weather—An evil beast—Vengeance—A successful right-and-left—Marmots—The disappearance of an ibex—Its head secured—Extremes of temperature—The luck of ibex-shooting—A 51¼-inch trophy—Kalmuk characteristics—Another 50-inch head—Flooded rivers—Back to Kulja—Horn measurements.

FAR away in the heart of Asia, where remote Cathay holds shadowy dominion over nomad Kirgiz and Kalmuk, the waters of a great river roll placidly through a broad grassy plain. On either side fine ranges of mountains rise, and at their foot and along the river-banks small collections of *yurts* are to be found, the homes of Kirgiz and Kalmuk, who find ample pasturage in every direction for their flocks of sheep and vast herds of horses. They call both the river and the district Tekkes, though the former has a wider reputation under the name of Ili, which it assumes after taking a sudden turn in a direction from north-east to north-west, before it flows past Kulja, and on till it empties itself into Lake Balkash.

But it is with one of its tributaries which race down from the mountains on the south-east that I am concerned in the present chapter. Of these there are several, each one of which flows through a land infested with game, the Geok Su or Blue river,

the Kara Su or Black river, the Ak Su or White river, and the Oriyaas, up which I journeyed rifle in hand during the first half of June 1903. I believe there is no spot known to the European sportsman which can lay juster claim to the title of "sportsman's paradise" for the particular game it produces—the ibex, Asiatic wapiti, and Asiatic roe-deer—than the wooded slopes and grassy corries, the steep ravines and rocky precipices, which here abound in what may be described as the mountain pendants of the great central system of the Thian Shan. In the days of long ago, when Kashmir was first exploited by the sportsman, the sport obtained may have come up to that now obtainable in the Thian Shan, but I doubt if the barasingh ever carried so massive and heavy a horn as the Asian wapiti, or if there was ever the same number of ibex with heads equal to those which range the mountains in the vicinity of Tekkes.

This land, like most lands of plenty, is a distant one, and cannot be reached without a considerable expenditure of time and forethought. Mr Church has given an admirable description of the long days of weary marching, even after the stupendous Himalayan and Karakoram ranges are crossed, which await the traveller journeying hither from India.[1] From the west, however, far less difficulty is encountered. Permission once obtained from the authorities at St Petersburg to carry rifles, the Transcaspian railway lands one at Tashkent in Turkestan, whence a post-road is available to Kulja. Allowing a month for the journey to Kulja, a delay there, varying according to circumstances, while obtaining transport for the remainder of the journey,

[1] Chinese Turkestan.

and from eight to ten days' caravanning to the upper reaches of the Oriyaas stream, and in from six weeks to two months after leaving London the sportsman will find himself camped in the cream of his shooting.

The prospect of securing transport speedily at Kulja is dependent on the demand and supply of horses. There is a caravan route from Kashgar which passes by the town of Aksu over the Muzart Pass, and through Tekkes to Kulja, and it was from a *caravan-bashi* who had travelled up along this route that I obtained my ponies. I offered him twenty roubles a-month per pony — excellent pay, since after reaching the Oriyaas river they would have little to do except rest and grow fat on the rich pasturage on the river-banks. The man, however, was a true Oriental, and having ascertained that there were very few ponies in the town, promptly demanded thirty, finally, with great magnanimity, saying that as I was no doubt anxious to proceed without undue loss of time, he would clinch a bargain, and supply me with ponies at twenty-five roubles a-head per month. I metaphorically kicked him out of the house, and told him that he might come back when he came to his senses, when I might possibly still be willing to offer him twenty roubles. He smiled and went, and the days passed, and any morning I might see him idling contentedly in the bazaar, but he made no attempt to renew negotiations. I think I knew all along in my heart of hearts the fatuity of any European attempting to compete with an Asiatic in a game of waiting! The keep of his horses cost him nothing,—indeed they lived sumptuously on the luxuriant vegetation of the Ili valley,—his last journey had brought him

sufficient means for subsistence for many days to come, and rather than climb down from the position he had taken up he would, I am convinced, have waited with absolute complacency until either destitution or the crack of doom constrained him to move. I, unfortunately, had not the unlimited time at my disposal which he appeared to have, and at the end of a week I bowed to the inevitable, gave him his twenty-five roubles, and proceeded on my way.

There is, of course, no bridge over the Ili river—Why should there be? the Chinaman would probably ask—and the same inconvenient ferry-boat which has somewhere been aptly described as a "muddy box," and which has been handed on from prehistoric times of the past, to continue in all probability to a corresponding period in the future, is the only means of getting across. From here, striking south-east, we crossed the spur of mountains rising between Kulja and Tekkes, and on the evening of the fifth day reached the Ili once more and halted for the night in a *yurt* put at our disposal by the headman of a Kalmuk *aoul* (village of *yurts*). Here a day's halt was necessary while engaging Kalmuks as guides and hunters, and buying a small flock of sheep to drive along with us for our food-supply, for the Oriyaas valley is uninhabited; but on the last day of May I reached the gorge where the river escapes from the mountains, and, crossing a low ridge, found myself at the foot of the mountain valley.

I wish I could give a description even approaching the reality of the extraordinary beauty of the scenery through which the Oriyaas flows. Photographs may give the outline, but they cannot reproduce the wonderful colouring, to which is perhaps to be chiefly attributed the extraordinary charm of the view. The river's source

CROSSING THE ILI RIVER.

must be looked for among the primeval ice and snows of the innermost recesses of the Celestial Mountains, but after leaving the frozen world of its birth it flows through a perfect garden of delight, the grassy lawns, planted here and there with picturesque clumps of fir-trees, which line its banks resembling rather the neat slopes of artistic and well-kept pleasure-grounds than the untrimmed reaches of a natural wild. From the green levels of the river-banks steep mountains rise on either side, carpeted with grass and flowers, and in many parts well wooded with many kinds of bush and handsome fir, while above the line of trees weird crags and pinnacles of rock protrude, throwing a sharp serrated outline against the sky, and above all glistens a pure white roof of eternal snow. As one turns each fresh corner in one's onward march a new vista of beauty opens out, combining in a single picture the wild beauty familiar to those who have roamed among the mountains on the west coast of Scotland, the wooded magnificence of Kashmir, and the jagged outlines which are so conspicuous a feature of the rugged Taurus Mountains. I have seen many scenes which have impressed me more with a sense of forbidding grandeur,—the stupendous cone of Persian Demavend, the colossal mountain masses on India's north-west frontier, the extraordinary mountain labyrinths of Baltistan, and above all, perhaps, the unequalled spectacle which meets the eye as one gazes up at the gigantic peaks reared aloft in every direction round the Bunji plain,—but I can call to mind no prospect which has satisfied the eye with quite the same sense of content as the varied loveliness of the Oriyaas valley.

The hunters of the country are the Kalmuks, like the Kirgiz a race of Mongolian origin, but one which has better preserved its type. Like the Kirgiz, too, they

live in villages of grey felt tents, but, unlike the former, who are Mohammedans, are Buddhists by religion, their priests or lamas easily recognisable by their scarlet and yellow robes. Their features are of the true Mongolian type, with little hair upon the face, while they wear the orthodox Chinese pig-tail hanging far down their backs. Among the Kalmuks of Tekkes was one who, like Nimrod of old, was "a mighty hunter," and so great was his reputation in this respect that, though usage among the Kalmuks demands that the younger shall serve the older, men of greater age than he would unhesitatingly obey him in the chase. I was not surprised, therefore, to hear that he was away hunting in the mountains; but luck was with me, for he too had selected the Oriyaas valley as his hunting-ground, and on June 3 I ran him to ground, and secured his services during the time that I was shooting. My quarry was of course the ibex, since the horns of the wapiti, like those of the red-deer, do not reach a state of perfection until August or September. Not so with the Kalmuks. Their hunting is for existence, not for sport, and by an unlucky chance for the persecuted stag, the medicinal property of the unformed horn commands a high price throughout China,—as much as ten roubles (over 21s.) a pound,—so that during the months of June and July he is hunted and pursued with relentless perseverance. A fixed salary, however, and the promise of a present for every big head that fell to my rifle, was sufficient temptation to induce Nurah—the Kalmuk Nimrod—to leave for a time the less certain occupation of hunting wapiti; and having engaged two other Kalmuks, Hoh-Hah and Jergol, to make themselves useful on the hillside and in camp, I lost no time in trying my luck after ibex.

As already stated, the sport obtainable is of the best,

A VIEW IN THE ORIYAAS VALLEY.

and in thirteen days' actual shooting I accounted for fifteen ibex, among which were some magnificent heads. Let me take a day or two's sport at random from the pages of my diary.

June 4.—Leaving camp early in the morning we rode up the right bank of the river, spying the steep mountain-sides above us as we went. Before long we came to a turbulent mountain torrent which hurled itself down a bed of rock, and, like the waters at Lodore, came "dashing and flashing and splashing and clashing" till it tumbled headlong into the channel of the main stream. High up on a steep mountain-face overhanging this turbulent torrent, sparsely covered with low bushes, but plentifully with long slippery grass, we saw a herd of ibex, and among them more than one carrying horns, which appeared through the glass to be of enormous size. Tying up the ponies, we proceeded to climb up the rocky banks of the stream, crouching along under cover of the low bushes with which it was fringed. While thus engaged I made more than one discovery: first, that the Kalmuk hunter, unlike the stalker on a Scotch deer-forest or the shikari of India or Kashmir, has no sort of idea of burdening himself with your rifle; and, second—a far more disagreeable surprise—that nothing will induce him to go hunting without his own rifle on his back, a fearful weapon, with long forked attachment as rest, which, as he crouched along in front of me, was continually threatening to disgorge one of my eyes!

At length, after much patient crawling over rock and boulder, we succeeded in putting a ridge between ourselves and the herd, and were able to assume an upright position once more, and to take a breath before starting on the steep ascent in front of us. Half an hour's struggle up a steep mountain-side covered with

long slippery grass, which made climbing very arduous, brought us level with the ibex, and worming our way to the top of a ridge, we found ourselves in an excellent position a bare hundred yards from the nearest beasts. I selected my animal while Nurah crawled up close behind me, and as soon as he turned broadside, fired. Immediately there was a loud report in my ear, and I turned round to see the Kalmuk's rifle smoking within a foot of my head! Two ibex lay dead on the ground, and when I came to measure them I found mine had a splendid head of just over 48 inches, while Nurah's carried a horn of 42 inches. I found it was quite impossible to prevent Nurah shooting when in sight of game, so came to an arrangement with him by which he agreed not to shoot until I had had my shot, and then not to fire at the big ones. This he was quite willing to do, since the horns were of no value to him, and he only cared about the body and the skin, the former of which he ate, and with the latter of which he clothed himself.

I was agreeably surprised to find that there was no necessity for very early starts in the mornings. I have vivid recollections when shooting in the Himalayas of being dragged reluctantly out of bed in the grey light of dawn, when dawn broke at 4 A.M., and sometimes before, to begin clambering up the mountains by the dim light of the paling stars. But here I seldom left camp before 7 A.M., and never before 5 A.M., since the amount of snow lying on the mountains deterred the ibex from seeking the seclusion of the distant and often inaccessible rocks which rose above the woods and grassy corries of the lower slopes. Indeed, though it was June, the weather was a strange mixture of summer and winter. There was nearly always a sharp frost at night, and heavy storms of rain, turning to snow, at

IN THE ORIYAAS VALLEY.

sundown were common. On the night of May 26 the thermometer registered 13° of frost, and from 6° to 8° was the usual amount during the first half of June. From the 4th to the 11th we experienced frightful storms, which came on every afternoon with clockwork regularity, lasting well on into the night, and leaving a covering of snow even down in the valley bottom where we were camped. The variations in the temperature were violent in consequence. From early morning to noon, when the snow-clouds began to gather, the thermometer would rise steadily. Then, as soon as the sun was obscured, and snow and rain came driving down the mountain-sides, down would come the mercury with a jump, falling 70° or 80° in half as many minutes, and readings such as I find I have recorded on June 14, when the thermometer stood at 26° Fahr. early in the morning, and a few hours later in the sun at 112°, were common. The winter, no doubt, had been an unusually late one here, as it appears to have been throughout Asia, and when I left the upper reaches of the Oriyaas, early in the third week of June, bushes and shrubs were only just breaking into bud.

On June 5 I explored the ground up a tributary stream to the south, and saw ibex on the hills on either side. Much of the ground is excellent stalking-ground, which is as well perhaps for the sportsman, for the ibex is no fool, and takes excellent precautions against surprise, a fact of which I was afforded evidence on this occasion. I was climbing up one side of a steep ravine, well out of sight of the herd I was after, when suddenly on the sky-line opposite us appeared a pair of horns. We—Nurah, Hoh-Hah, and myself—dropped to earth where we were, and watched anxiously while the animal came slowly into full view, while it stood like a statue gazing down

towards the valley below. We were constrained to remain motionless too, in a most irksome position, and when, after standing like stone for a quarter of an hour, the evil beast lay down where he was, the situation became acute. A fragment of rock was grinding into my back, a stone was gradually becoming loosened under pressure of my foot, and, before long, precisely what I was expecting came about —the stone gave way, and went rumbling down the hill with those aggravating resounding bumps which rolling stones delight in when one is particularly anxious to avoid attracting attention. I grabbed at the nearest rock to prevent myself following in its track, and the author of this unfortunate situation sprang to his feet and came racing like a beast possessed down towards the valley bottom.

That was where he made a grave mistake, because it brought him within easy range of three exasperated men, two of whom happened to be carrying loaded rifles. I fired, and Nurah fired, six cartridges I think we expended between us while you could have counted ten, and a whoop of savage triumph rent the air as he tottered and then fell headlong, the mangled remains of what a moment before had been a joyous living ibex. Does it sound ugly now this tale of wilful wicked taking of life? I admit it, it was a desire for vengeance, cruel, vindictive vengeance, that actuated me, for, truth to tell, I knew full well his horns were not worth the powder expended on them. Perhaps it was Nurah who fired the fatal shot, and maybe he is happier where he is, roaming the ghostly mountains of some wild Valhalla, where ibex ghosts delight to be.

Later in the day fortune favoured us, for we came across a herd towards evening grazing in a grassy hollow quite unsuspicious of danger lurking near. The

stalk was not a long one, for we were above them when we saw them, and within an hour of the time when I started after them I had secured a right-and-left—two fine heads of 46 and 49 inches respectively.

A day or two later I moved farther up the Oriyaas stream. All along the river-banks that curious little rodent the marmot swarmed, sitting bolt upright over his hole, uttering his weird, shrill little note, and disappearing like a jack-in-the-box whenever we approached too close. Once Nurah made out the tracks of a big wapiti, and went nearly mad with excitement until I told him he could go and try his luck after it. He went off towards dusk and spent the rest of the night in the gloomy depths of the forest, but no success rewarded his efforts.

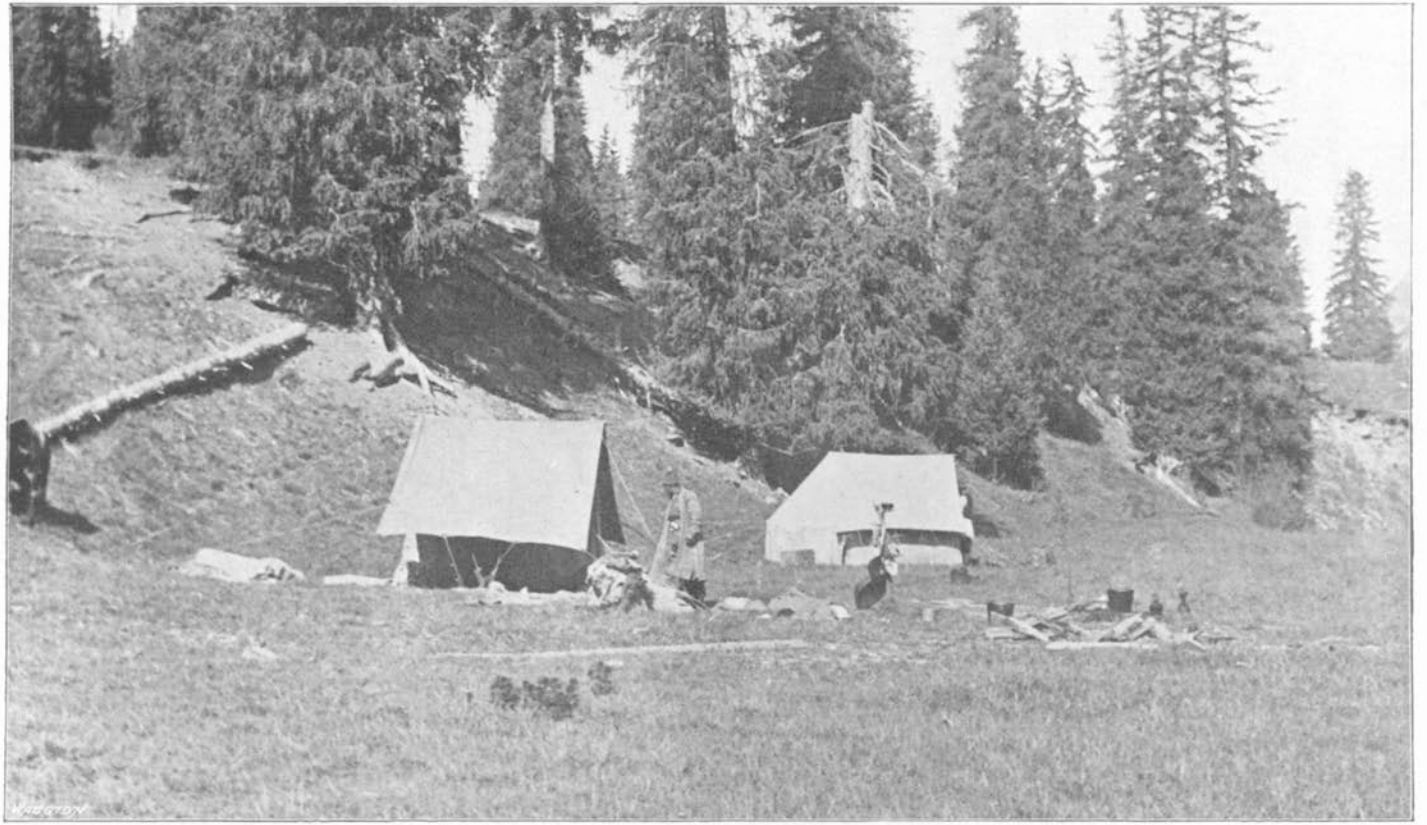
A day or two after this I had a most exciting stalk in wild rocky ground, where, in a long past geologic era, some convulsive spasm of nature had torn great rents and thrown up odd excrescences. Grass grew here where it could, and trees and bushes seemed to find foothold in the rock itself, and ibex revelled to the utmost in projecting crags and sheltered hollows. They were there on this occasion, a dozen beauties, and off we went to circumvent them. The climb was steep, as is generally the case when a big ibex is at the other end of it, and an hour had passed before we found ourselves in a position to crawl up for a shot; but so far all was well, for they had not moved from the spot where we had first caught sight of them.

I crawled flat to the top of a little ridge, and straight below me, at a distance which I judged to be 200 yards, stood a fine beast, while others were lying down or cropping grass close by. I held my breath, pressed the butt hard against my shoulder, and then fired. The usual confusion which follows a shot ensued. Ibex

were springing up in all directions, disappearing and reappearing among the crags and boulders through which they picked their way. The beast I fired at sprang high in the air and then vanished, as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up. A hoarse "Shot!" from Nurah (this was his one word of English) set me wondering whether he wished to convey the idea that I had shot the beast or that I should shoot again. Taking it for the latter, to be on the safe side, I drew a bead on another beast, which appeared bewildered and undecided which way to go, and pressed the trigger. "Shot!" again came from close behind me, and this time there was no doubt what was intended, for I saw the beast fall dead myself.

Certainly one head, perhaps two,—not so bad for one morning, I thought. But things were not quite so bright as they had seemed, for when we reached the fallen beast which I had brought down with my second shot, we found that he had a horn of little more than 40 inches, and number one was nowhere to be found. I went up to the spot where he had been standing, and found myself on the very brink of a yawning chasm, which gave seemingly into the bowels of the earth, whence there issued a rumbling of subterranean waters. Climbing a short way down the side, I peered into the abyss below, and after becoming accustomed to the darkness, made out with the aid of my glasses a pair of horns, wedged evidently between two rocks in the very middle of an angry torrent, whose waters roared and hissed, and threw up great jets of foam as they raced through a tunnel to the open mountain-side beyond.

The horns had all the appearance of being very large ones; but their size remained a matter of conjecture—for the time being—for not even a Kalmuk would trust himself unaided into the swirling cauldron far



CAMPED IN THE THIAN SHAN.

below. Nothing, therefore, remained but to return to camp, and to devise some means for securing the dead beast on the morrow. This was soon decided on, and early the following morning we returned to the scene of our stalk, provided with ropes. The ibex was still visible, wedged between the same two rocks, and making the rope secure round the Kalmuk Jergol, we let him down hand over hand into the gulf below. Once safely down he found foothold among the rocks, and having succeeded in cutting off the head, signalled to us to hand it up. This we did, and immediately afterwards pulled up Jergol, landing him safely on *terra firma* once more.

There was much excitement when I drew out the tape to measure the horn, one and all who had gazed at it while it remained safely out of reach declaring that it must be well over 50 inches. I laid the tape, carefully counting the inches as it reached towards the tip, forty-four, forty-five, forty-six — and a half! Exclamations of incredulity burst forth all round, but the tape could not lie, and 46½ inches was the utmost that it would concede. So the great head, which I had dreamed about all night, and which had been rescued at the expense of so much difficulty and trouble, turned out after all to be not so very great, and to fall short by 3½ inches of the limit which constitutes a really good head for the Thian Shan.

The middle of June was now fast approaching, much ground still remained to be covered before my programme of Asiatic travel was completed, and though I should be sadly disappointed at having to leave without carrying a 50-inch trophy away with me, I decided that two more days were the most that I could afford to give up to the attempt to secure one. As Joseph lucidly remarked, "If git, git; if not git, not

git, can't help," which being interpreted meant, if we got one, well and good; if we did not, we had at any rate done our best, and there was no help for it.[1]

I started early on the morning of the 14th, while the thermometer still stood 6° below freezing-point; but the cold soon changed to heat, for the sun shone fiercely from a cloudless sky, and the mercury had mounted to 112° (Fahr.) before I returned to camp. We rode along as usual, Nurah in front, myself and another Kalmuk behind,—all clinging to our stout little ponies as they struggled up the steep mountain-sides, or scrambled down to the depths of some intervening ravine, our attention constantly occupied in preventing our saddles from slipping off over our ponies' tails, or precipitating us unawares over their heads.

Suddenly Nurah slid off his pony as if he had been shot, and I pulled mine on to his haunches in an endeavour to do likewise. The ponies were dragged down into a hollow, and Nurah pointed excitedly down into a corrie in front of us, whispering "Tekke" (ibex). Sure enough we had stumbled almost on top of a small herd of males, lying quietly on a steep sloping hillside before us. It was all very sudden and unexpected, but there we were, actually within shot of them; and a few seconds later an ibex was lying dead to the first shot, and another was moving slowly off, evidently damaged somewhere by the second. I ran to intercept him farther up the ravine, and ten

[1] For the benefit of the uninitiated I must point out that whereas there would in reality appear to be very little material difference between a horn which measured 49½ inches and one which measured 50 inches, the paltry half-inch does, as a matter of fact, in the eyes of any one who has gone in for collecting trophies, constitute a vast and insufferable gap! To have shot a 50-inch ibex is to have achieved a success with which the slaying of a 49½-inch beast could never compare!

minutes later was fortunate enough to bring to bag the much-coveted 50-inch head.

It was a fair illustration of the luck connected with ibex-shooting. To begin with, we had dropped on them quite accidentally, and then the beast carefully selected as the largest, which fell to the first shot, proved to have a horn of only 43½ inches, while the second, picked out hurriedly as the herd moved off, turned out to be a far finer beast, carrying a horn of 51¾. The first bullet, which seemed to daze him, I found imbedded in the horn.

Nurah and the other Kalmuk were gleefully happy, and laughed and shouted with delight as they cut up and skinned the two beasts, and then they loaded them upon the ponies and carried them down to a sheltered hollow, and were soon giving material proof of their satisfaction. A fire was lighted, a cooking-pot and a large chunk of green brick tea produced—most things necessary for Kalmuk life were generally to be found strapped somewhere on one of the ponies—and the marrow-bones thrown on to the embers to roast. This savoury repast finished, they betook themselves to the joy of chewing *nahs*, a compound of powdered tobacco and ashes, expectorating thoughtfully on the ground at brief intervals in emphasis of their appreciation. Chewing *nahs* is a habit which appears to be pretty general among the tribes of Turkestan, and frequent expectoration a necessary part of the practice. A Kalmuk expectorates at all times and under all circumstances indiscriminately, whether he be in his *yurt* or in the open; wherefore, when I called my hunters to my tent for consultation, they had to be content with sitting outside.

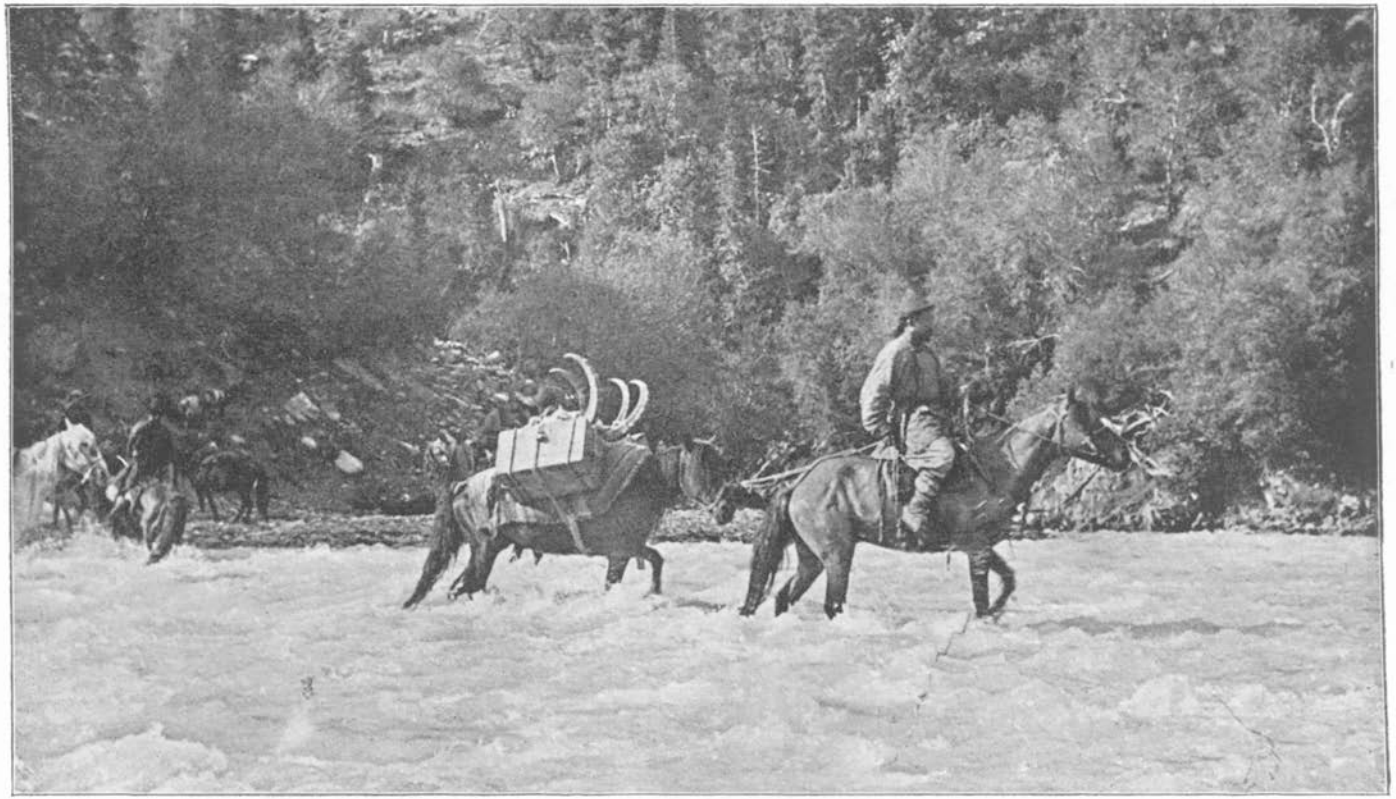
It was quite early, but we had done well enough for one day, and after the marrow-bones had all been

picked clean, and the horns and skins had been tied on to the ponies, we made our way back to camp.

Fortune is proverbially a fickle goddess, but she smiled on me during these last two days of my sporting expedition, for having vouchsafed to me a 51¾-inch ibex as narrated above, she was further pleased to bestow upon me another 50-inch head on my last day's shooting. Two 50-inch heads in the last two days, after having spent the previous eleven in fruitless endeavour! It was all very satisfactory, and every one was pleased, more especially when I doled out bricks of tea and bags of *nahs*, of which I had laid in a stock at Kulja, to celebrate the successful termination of the trip.

On June 16 we struck camp and started on our return march down the Oriyaas valley. The melting snows had converted all the streams into foaming torrents, which raced angrily over uneven rocky beds, making it difficult and sometimes even dangerous for the baggage-ponies to cross. By marching at very early hours, however, while frost still held their source in check, we reached the Tekkes plain without mishap, though even here, despite its comparatively sluggish flow, the river was a power not to be despised. We crossed successfully in the ferry, our ponies, freed from their pack-saddles, swimming across after us; but a body of Kalmuks who happened to be crossing at the same time were not so fortunate—one of their ponies being drowned while struggling against the current. The mishap, however, appeared to please them rather than otherwise, for the body was fished out of the stream lower down, and the last I saw of them they were making a hearty meal off the sodden carcass!

On June 23, exactly one month after leaving, I marched back into Kulja. A more enjoyable sporting trip it would be difficult to imagine, and the time will



CROSSING A MOUNTAIN TORRENT.

"The melting snows had converted all the streams into foaming torrents."—Page 240.

be far distant when memory fails to recall the pleasant camps, the magnificent scenery, and the grand sport which I enjoyed among the rock-crowned peaks and the smiling valleys of the Thian Shan.

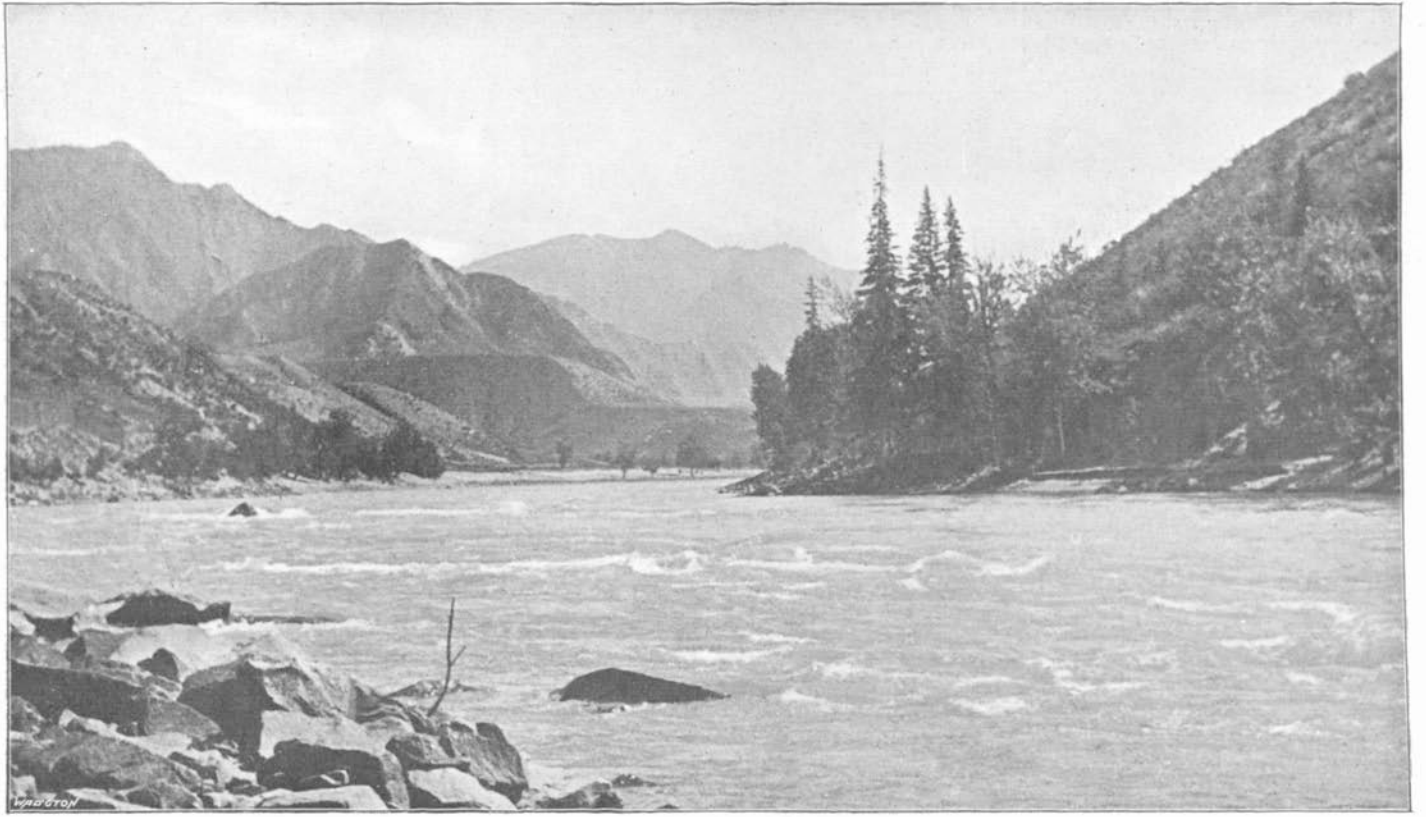
The measurements of my seven best heads were as follows: 51¾, 50, 49¼, 48½, 47¼, 46½, and 46 inches; the length of the six record heads, either picked up or shot, recorded up to the present time in Mr Rowland Ward's standard work on horn measurements being 56¾ (picked up), 56 (picked up), 54¾, 54⅜ (picked up), and two of 54 inches each.

CHAPTER XXI.

AFTER WILD SHEEP IN THE SIBERIAN ALTAI.

The Altai—Mr Ney Elias observes numbers of large horns—Major Cumberland's expedition—The way to the Altai—Time occupied by the journey—Expense—Kosh-Agach—Nature of the country—My Kalmuk hunter—The "Happy Valley"—A depressing day—Rams sighted—A wounded ram—My first head—A move into Mongolia—A big ram in view—Officious females—Nature's spell—A desperate race—A terrible disappointment.

My earliest recollections of the Altai are associated with a small book called, I think, 'Geography without Tears,' or some equally deceptive title, wherein it was laid down that the chief mountain-ranges of Asia were the Himalayas, the Hindu Kush, and the Altai. There may have been others included in the list, but these are the three that impressed themselves on my memory. Subsequent reading confirmed the accuracy of this information, for I learned that the Altai highlands embrace a superficial area of something approaching 144,140 square miles, or, to give a better idea perhaps, "the Altai," as we call it, is a vast highland plateau, intersected by numerous mountain-ridges, into which you would have no difficulty in getting nine or ten Switzerlands. When, therefore, I am asked if I have seen the Altai, I reply with some diffidence that I have seen some small portion of that country. I have



VIEW IN THE SIBERIAN ALTAI.

other rather vague memories concerning the Altai: that there is a theory that here was the cradle of the human race; that here, in the heart of the mountains, old Tubal Cain forged his swords and his ploughshares; and that, at any rate, whatever grounds there may be for such surmises concerning prehistoric times, there is no doubt whatever that here, buried in the bosom of the earth, almost fabulous mineral wealth awaits the pick and spade of the prospector.

It was not, however, with pick and shovel that I travelled to the confines of Mongolia. Thirty years ago an intrepid traveller, whose name is a widely known and honoured one in political circles in Asia, Mr Ney Elias, travelled through China and Siberia, and observed, among other things, the number of large horns of the great wild sheep of Mongolia which lay rotting along the banks of the streams in the valley bottoms and on the steep shaley hillsides which it frequents. Little came of it at the time; but twenty years later a well-known sportsman, Major Cumberland, came across Mr Ney Elias, and hearing from him of the possibilities of the Altai from a sporting point of view, immediately made arrangements for an expedition there, and in 1895 an English sportsman found himself, for the first time, rifle in hand, in search of wild sheep on the bare highlands of the Altai. From various causes few trophies rewarded his first efforts; but a second expedition the following year was crowned with success, and resulted in the arrival in London of the horns of wild rams which were described by Mr Rowland Ward as the finest he had ever seen. Such, in brief, is the history of the discovery of the Altai as a sporting country, and it is needless to say, perhaps, that other sportsmen were not slow to follow in the footsteps of the pioneer. Prince Demidoff has devoted

a whole volume to an account of an expedition undertaken in company with Mr Littledale, and I could name a dozen other sportsmen who have shot there on various occasions since 1895. This, however, is not far off the sum-total, and the head of a first-class Ovis Ammon is in all probability at the present day one of the rarest trophies to be found among the museums and private collections of horns in Great Britain.[1]

And now, how to get there will probably be the first query of the curious sportsman. Those who have serious thoughts of undertaking an expedition will probably invest in a copy of Prince Demidoff's 'After Wild Sheep in Mongolia and the Altai,'[2] or of a more recent work by Major H. G. C. Swayne, entitled 'Through the Highlands of Siberia,' published since my return, which will supply him with all the information he will require, and I need do no more than briefly indicate here the means at present available for the use of travellers. A choice of routes, then, is open as far as Moscow, which may be looked upon as the starting-point of the expedition, since here is the terminus of the great Trans-Siberian railway, along which it is necessary to travel for the next 3391 versts to Ob, on the river of that name. No difficulty need be apprehended thus far, and, indeed, travelling on the Siberian railway may be described as journeying with a maximum of comfort at a minimum of expense. From Ob steamers ply frequently to Barnaul, capital of one of

[1] I distinguish between the wild sheep of Mongolia, which I believe to be the true *Ovis Ammon*, and the wild sheep of Tibet (*O. Hodsoni*), usually miscalled the Ammon.

[2] Published by Rowland Ward. The reduction of versts to miles is somewhat inaccurate. For instance, I find on page 36, "150 versts, or about 120 miles." Now, since a verst is ·66 of a mile, it is obvious that 150 versts cannot possibly be more than 100 miles. This is an error, however, which the sportsman will easily correct for himself.

the seven divisions of the Tomsk government, and thence on to Biisk, the chief town of another district, where the river must be left and recourse had to wheeled conveyance. There are good shops at both of these places, where ordinary stores — such as jam, biscuits, and a certain assortment of tinned goods—are obtainable, though, for my own part, I prefer always bringing such goods with me from London. From Biisk there has been a post-road for many years as far as the village of Onguidai, a distance of about 250 versts, and for the last two years the Russian authorities have been engaged in constructing a road for small light carriages from Onguidai to the frontier at Kosh-Agach, a distance of another 250 versts, which was almost completed when I left the country at the end of August 1903. I must warn the traveller, however, that the Biisk-Kosh-Agach post-road differs from other post-roads in Asiatic Russia in that there is no fixed tariff for the hire of horses,—government horses not being obtainable by the ordinary traveller,—and he will find himself in the unenviable position of having to pay whatever is demanded by the peasants owning horses at the various villages on the way. Between Onguidai and Kosh-Agach the country is inhabited only by Kalmuks, living scattered widely in *yurts*, and it is advisable to hire horses at Onguidai for the whole of the remainder of the journey. Once at Kosh-Agach there only remains to engage pack-ponies and Kalmuk guides or hunters, and to make a day's journey into the mountains to the south, to find oneself on one's shooting-ground.

Time occupied by the journey? Well, three days from London to Moscow, a day or two there according to fancy, and five days on to Ob—say from ten days to a fortnight to the end of the railway. Three or four days

by steamer to Biisk, and a day or two there to make arrangements for the road, brings the total up to from sixteen to twenty days; and if you do not waste too much time bargaining for horses on the road, another four days will take you easily to Onguidai. A day or more may possibly have to be spent here while securing horses to Kosh-Agach, which can be reached in from five to eight days, according to the state of the road and whether you decide to drive or take pack-ponies. If you have not a great deal of baggage, I would recommend wheels as the quickest. This brings the total time from London to Kosh-Agach up to, roughly speaking, a month.

Expense? That is a question which I would not venture to advise upon. You might be back in London in three months from the time you started, having accomplished your trip for £250; but you might, on the other hand, have spent £500,—expenditure is so largely dependent on personal idiosyncrasy, as well as on a whole host of minor circumstances.[1] This, then, must suffice for my duties as a guide.

I have said that the horns of the *Ovis Ammon* make one of the rarest trophies obtainable at the present day; I might also add that the beast that carries them is about the most difficult animal to stalk successfully that I have ever come across. This shall be my excuse for describing a few days' sport of my own; and lest I render these pages tedious with an unduly lengthy description of the country, I will omit all account of my journey there, and begin at once at Kosh-Agach, close to the scene of action. For a week I had been marching through magnificent mountain scenery, where dense

[1] Major Swayne gives much useful information concerning outfit, expense, &c., in an appendix to his book. He there works out the expenditure on a three months' trip in detail, arriving at a total of £256.

CAMPED IN THE ALTAI.

forests of fir and cedar clothed the hillsides, and grass and wild-flowers grew in riotous profusion; and when one morning I emerged from a wooded valley along which the river Chuya worms its way, and was confronted by the Kosh-Agach plateau, the change of scenery came as a shock. Tree-life ceased abruptly, as though a line had been drawn beyond which Nature dared such things to pass; a bleak uninviting expanse stretched away to the east, and all round bare brown hills filled in the view, recalling the triumphant sterility of Tibet. This first impression was a little misleading it is true, for a closer acquaintance revealed the fact that the lower slopes of these hills are covered with grass and a mass of gorgeous wild-flowers; but above the zone of grass and flowers rise cones of black and brick-red shale, which at a little distance fill the eye and stamp the impress of their horrid nakedness upon the whole surrounding.

The settlement of Kosh-Agach, consisting of a few wooden houses built by merchants trading with Mongolia, a wooden church and a custom-house, has no attraction of itself; and as soon as pack-ponies and Kalmuk hunters were engaged, I hastened into the mountains to the south, pitching my tents on the evening of the second day at the foot of an odd detached offshoot of the main range called "Tuzzi" or "the chest," close to the junction of the streams which flow down valleys called Chagan Burgaza and Bain Chagan.

Every sportsman knows that feeling of keen anticipation which assails him when, after many days of monotonous journeying thither, he at last finds himself in the land of his desire. Excitement at the possibilities of the morrow, fear lest after all the quarry may not be there, a still more disagreeable reflection that if it is he may get a shot and miss! combine to

produce a sensation which is almost too keen to be pleasant. At 4 A.M. the following morning I was up and dressed, and before 5, when the sun was just casting his first rays over the tops of the mountains above my camp, I started, followed by two Kalmuks —one, reputed a cunning hunter, to accompany me when game was found, the other to hold the ponies, —for we always started on horseback. A Kalmuk would never dream of going anywhere on his own legs when he could make his pony do their work for them,— that, he says, would obviously be foolish, wherein he undoubtedly shows a certain practical common-sense. It must be admitted, however, that here his common-sense stops short: in general a block of wood would be a mass of intelligence in comparison, and therefore, lest by any possibility I do him any injury in railing at his obtuseness, my hunter shall rejoice in a fictitious name, and Pombo he shall be to the end of the chapter.

This, my first day after the great wild sheep, was not encouraging: it was worse, it was gloomily depressing. I started up the Bain Chagan, Demidoff's "Happy Valley," and searched it from top to bottom, and when I reached the watershed went on over the shaley slopes which overlook Mongolia; but there was nothing in the least degree felicitous about it on this occasion, for not a sign of a beast did I see, and passing on along the summit of the ridge I returned by the Chagan Burgaza, reaching camp once more, tired and dispirited, at 7 P.M., after a futile fourteen hours in the saddle.

Pombo looked wise when I consulted him as to what was to be done on the morrow, said we would start up the Bain Chagan again and take a turn over the hills to the east instead of the west as we had done to-day.

What did he think of our chances of finding game there? Well, he thought we might see something, though, of course, on the other hand, we might not. Of course I could have told him that much myself, and I did tell him he was an ass—I was not in a very good temper—which he of course did not understand, so he smiled idiotically, and then betook himself to his tea and his slumbers.

The next day was a great day, because on it I secured my first ram. It was not a big one, quite a moderate head in fact, measuring only 42 inches; but I was wildly delighted when I secured it, all the more from having to put up with much anxiety, which at one time turned to despair, before becoming finally possessed of it.

We had seen four small rams moving slowly across the heights on the eastern side of the valley, and I had been examining them curiously through the glass, for they were the first I had seen, but I soon realised that they were very small,—far too small to be worth shooting,—and was beginning to wonder if to-day was going to be as yesterday, when Pombo suddenly exclaimed Koshkhor! —the native name of the ram. I jumped up and hurriedly scanned the hillside, and sure enough there, far away close to the horizon, was a herd of rams. I could not make out if there were big ones or not, they were too far off, but Pombo said there were, so off we went. We were successful in getting above them; but for some reason, just when we were starting to crawl into sight for a shot the whole herd bolted, and I had to take a snap-shot at the nearest flying beast. I heard the welcome thud which tells of a bullet gone home, and ran on to the spot where the beasts went out of sight; but when I got there, search as I would, no dead sheep was to be found. Presently a dark red stain caught my eye, and then ensued one of those

stern-chases which so often end in failure. Over endless piles of shale we tracked the wounded beast, until at last the sun sank behind the hills in the west, and the chill shadow which enveloped the land sank deep into our own souls as we made up our minds that we must return home without him.

One of the Kalmuks led the ponies slowly down the hill, while I and Pombo walked on, intending to join them lower down the valley. Suddenly, half an hour later, just as we were scrambling down to the valley bottom, Pombo quite unexpectedly stumbled on the tracks of the wounded beast again, and at the same moment I heard a rattling of stones, and looking up saw the wounded ram just on the other side of a narrow valley in front of us. I threw up the rifle, pushed up the 200 yards' sight, fired, and brought him down, all before Pombo had time to realise what I was doing! And that was how I secured my first pair of horns. It was a fortunate shot in more ways than one, for when I got back to camp I found that the man whom I had sent off the day before to buy sheep had not returned, and we had literally exhausted our supply of meat, the last bone having just been boiled down to make soup for dinner.

Another futile day on the Siberian side of the frontier decided me to change my quarters and make a move into Mongolia. Accordingly, having issued instructions for camp to be moved across the watershed and pitched on the banks of a stream at a spot known to the Kalmuks, I started off across the mountains to the south. It is fortunate that a benign Providence has decreed that man remain in ignorance of what awaits him. Had I foreseen the disappointment and exasperation which was awaiting me I should probably never have started on that particular day's sport, but have

LOADING UP THE AMMON.

rested content with plodding along in the wake of my pack-ponies. Certainly I should not have been in the high spirits that I was. To enjoy hunting wild sheep to the full you must be possessed of a whole host of virtues—endurance, good temper, an inexhaustible stock of patience, perseverance, and an unlimited capacity for putting up with disappointment. I do not say that I possess these qualities, I merely remark that this is the equipment which the hunter ought to have. But to return to the story.

We had toiled all the morning and seen nothing, and I was looking disconsolately round through my field-glasses when my attention was arrested by something moving on a distant sky-line. I was not given long to examine it, for it disappeared almost immediately; but the sight of a beast at all was enough to encourage us, and off we went up the steep shaley hills in front of us, clinging in various attitudes to our stout little ponies, till we reached a small hollow near the summit, where we left them and proceeded on foot to examine the ground that lay before us. Nor did we have to go very far, for after creeping across the bare hill, and crawling a little way down the far side, I became aware of the presence of a beast lying down straight below me. As I put my glass on to him, I felt my heart begin to thump against my ribs with suppressed excitement. I was gazing at a magnificent ram not more than a few hundred yards away from me. It was the first really big ram I had seen, and through my powerful Zeiss glasses he appeared to be almost at my feet. However, the immediate question of the moment was how to get within shot. A careful survey revealed the presence of three more rams, all lying down, and we were worming our way with infinite caution and patience down towards them, when sud-

denly four officious females stalked slowly into sight, and stood complacently surveying the scene, two hundred paces beyond the rams. Here was a horrible dilemma. The rams were beneath us, just visible when we craned our necks upwards to their utmost extent, but the females were in full view, and commanded the situation, for to move either backwards or forwards now would be to court instant detection.

It would be useless to try to give any real idea of the next two hours, for it is only the hunter who has tasted the joys and the bitter disappointments which assail him as he pursues his occupation amid the solitudes of a great lone land who can know the depths to which his feeling can be stirred, and no description is required to add to the picture which he himself will conjure up. As the sun slowly approached his cradle in the mountains of the west, an intense silence fell upon the earth, and the spell which Nature always weaves for the mortal who is fortunate enough to find himself alone with her came irresistibly upon me. Even the restless females at length gave themselves up to the peace of their surroundings, and lay down where they were, while observing the precaution of fixing their gaze each in a different direction. For an hour I lay in one position, scarcely daring to move lest I should disturb the stillness which reigned, and then a small bird flew down and perched on a stone close by. He looked at us, hopped a little nearer, and looked again. Then he tapped on a stone with his beak, and the tap, tap, tap sounded curiously loud to my strained senses. But his curiosity was quickly satisfied, for he soon flew away again, and when he was gone an unbroken silence enveloped us once more. Once or twice one of the sheep got slowly up, stretched himself, nibbled lazily at some infinitesimal blade of grass, and perhaps moved a

few paces before scratching at the earth preparatory to lying down again.

In the meantime the sun had sunk far down behind the mountains, casting long shadows towards the darkening east, and at length the patience of Pombo had reached its limit. He pointed to the west and shook his head, and then he dragged his hand along the ground, and nodded towards a slight depression twenty yards away. I nodded acquiescence, and we started, worming our way painfully after the manner of the serpent, and removing every stone that might become displaced. At last we reached our goal, took one last look at the recumbent sheep, and then crawled laboriously back up the shallow depression till we regained the hill-top, whence we had started two hours before. Then I ran, with the blood thumping through my veins, and my breath coming in short sharp gasps, for I was racing against time, and our chance lay in reaching the cover of a ridge which ran down on the opposite side of the hill to that by which we had tried to make our first approach.

We reached the friendly cover, and Pombo raised his head, slowly at first, and then less cautiously. I released the safety-bolt of the rifle, and raised myself slowly too. Pombo stood upright, gazed right and left, and then looked back at me. I saw disgust, hopeless and unutterable, written on every feature. "What is it?" I said. He picked up a handful of dust, tossed it in the air, and watched it float slowly away in front of us. "The wind," I said. Pombo disdained an answer, turned, and walked slowly back towards the ponies, and began leading them dolefully down the hill. I sat down and groaned. For two mortal hours had I crouched within 300 yards of four magnificent rams, unable even to cover them with my rifle. And then,

having with much labour crawled out of sight once more, I had made one wild desperate rush to get round them, reached my goal, and looked from behind my cover, to see—nothing. For not a sign of a living creature was to be seen; rams and ewes alike had vanished as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up, and the day which had begun so brightly ended in a dreary dismal ride in the dark over the miles of execrable ground that lay between us and camp.

CHAPTER XXII.

SPORT IN MONGOLIA.

A gazelle shot—Pombo's obtuseness—A long stalk—A flat crawl—An anxious wait—A big ram wounded—Pombo's jubilation—A 57-inch horn secured—A long ride in the dark—Ammon plentiful—A pack of wolves—Cold—A 55-inch ram shot—A right-and-left—Chase after a wounded ram—Stupidity of Kalmuks—The wounded ram brought to bag—Preparations for leaving the country—Horn measurements—Smuggling—Reach the Siberian railway.

WITH my move into Mongolia my bad luck soon came to an end. I sent a man off with my Chinese passport, a gorgeous foot or more of decorated parchment, to the nearest frontier guard, a movable institution that lived in a *yurt*, and having obtained permission to wander where I would, and the services of a Mongol fighting man as a witness of my being under official protection, marched along the foothills on the Mongolian side of the range, halting for two or three days at distances of ten or twelve miles, and shooting over the mountains in the vicinity of my camp.

Here and there on the lower ground I came across large herds of gazelle, and shot a fine buck one day, while on another occasion I had a desperate hunt after a huge wolf, without, however, succeeding in bringing him to bag. Still, big rams seemed difficult to find, and when found, still more difficult to approach, and I

began to wonder if the fears which so often assailed me were destined to come true. But a great day was coming, one of those red-letter days which stand out so clearly in the life of a sportsman.

It was the 13th of August, and the sun was just rising in a cloudless sky as we left our quarters on the banks of a tiny stream. But there was that hard cold look in the heavens which tells that you need expect no warmth from the dazzling sun, shine he never so brightly, and ere long a wind swept over the bare bleak hillsides, which made progress against it a severe effort, and chilled the blood in our veins, till feet and hands became numb, and the teeth chattered with the cold. We toiled long and hard and saw nothing, and at length at one o'clock, as I sat shivering under the lee of a rock, making the most of the slices of cold gazelle which made my lunch, Pombo crept up to me, and after shaking his head pointed repeatedly in the direction of camp. The temptation was great, to hurry back to the shelter of our tents; but I had been looking round, and through my glasses had just caught sight of a herd of rams.

I pointed in their direction. Pombo gazed blankly, and then, "Stones," he said. "Koshkhor" (rams), I answered. Pombo shook his head, took my glasses, and stared into vacancy. "Koshkhor," I said again. He looked at me, wavered, and then, "*Malinka*" (small). Our means of carrying on a conversation intelligible to both parties were limited—a few words of Russian, English, and Kalmuk, and a large assortment of gesticulations. "*Bolshoi*" (big), I maintained. Pombo refused to give way, so I took matters into my own hands, tethered the ponies in a hollow,—the other Kalmuk was not with us,—and signed to Pombo to follow me.

PACKING A PONY.

It was a long weary way before the rams could be approached, for the wind drove me to the top of a range of shaley hills, along the summit for about a mile, and then down again, above the spot where I had last seen them lying. To make a long story short, I found myself, at the end of about two hours, in a fairly favourable position; and, after taking a thorough survey through the glasses, began crawling carefully on with a view to the final approach. But the end of my stalk was by no means at hand, for five minutes later what should happen but that the sheep should get suddenly up, stretch themselves after their *siesta*, and then rush helter-skelter down the mountain-side across the valley bottom to some low foothills on the far side, where they proceeded to graze on such scanty herbage as succeeded in maintaining a precarious existence among the stones.

I heard a hoarse demoniacal chuckle behind me, and turned round to see the Kalmuk's ugly saturnine countenance at full grin. That decided me. I became desperate, and determined at all costs to be even with him. Putting a ridge between myself and the rams on the far side of the valley, I ran down to the bottom, where I was confronted with a flat open space, half a mile across. The case certainly appeared hopeless; but a little lower down I noticed a shallow gorge in the valley bottom, where a stream flowed down the mountain-side into the main stream in the middle. That, at any rate, would take me half-way across if it afforded sufficient shelter. Shall I ever forget the crawl along that stony water-channel? It was shallow, so shallow that I had to follow the tactics of the serpent, wriggling but a yard or so at a time, and keeping my glasses fixed on five busy heads, lying like a log whenever one of them was raised suspiciously from

the ground. It passed unnoticed at the time, but I observed, when it was all over, a dozen bleeding cuts on hands and knees. Somehow I reached the main stream, where a fairly high bank allowed a few minutes' rest in an upright position, and then peering anxiously over the top I saw the five big rams still grazing quietly about a quarter of a mile from me.

But more satisfactory still was the fact that they were grazing slowly away from me, and that immediately in front of them rose a low ridge, so that, provided they continued in their present direction, they must soon pass out of sight, and so give me a chance of covering the few hundreds of yards of open ground which still lay in front of me. Pombo, who had been left some way behind, now came up, and seeing how near I was to getting a shot, forgot his "I-told-you-so" attitude —he got a bonus on every big head which I secured —and became as keenly interested in the proceedings as I was. How slowly the beasts moved! And evening was fast settling down. Sometimes a blade of grass would catch the eye of one of them, and he would turn back to crop it, causing a delay of several precious minutes. At last, however, the summit of the ridge was reached, and they began moving out of sight on the far side. For some minutes the last of them stood gazing round on the crest, but once satisfied he too went on, and the way was clear. Now was my chance! I pulled myself together, climbed out of the river-bed, and then ran; ran as though my life depended on it, across those few hundred yards of flat, stony, coverless ground, till I was on the very ridge which the rams had just crossed. A moment to get breath,

A FINE OVIS AMMON.

"I heard of an animal called . . . Kooshgar. . . . It is described as larger than a cow and less than a horse; of a white colour, with pendent hair under its chin, and crowned with horns of huge dimensions. These are described to be so large that no one man can lift a pair of them!"—ALEXANDER BURNS.

and then—but all thought of the next step was instantly banished. A puff of wind or the sound of a falling stone reached the still invisible rams, and the next moment they were streaming back across the valley.

The first shot brought one down. "*Malinka*," hissed Pombo, and I aimed again. But now they were travelling fast, and try as I would I could not cover one. The hoarse bark of a wolf came from behind me. The rams hesitated, pulled up for a second, and looked round. I had the 300 yards' sight up, and fired at the leader, a grey-haired beast with a massive head. He went on for a few yards and then sank down, while the rest disappeared up the mountain-side. Pombo shrieked a triumphant war-whoop, and nearly spoilt everything by dancing a wild fandango across the valley bottom and half-way up the hillside opposite, for, as I soon discovered, the beast was very far from being dead; and after capturing the Kalmuk and subduing him by threats of summary justice with the butt-end of my rifle, I proceeded to make a careful stalk after the wounded beast, and was lucky enough to get up unobserved and give him a death-shot at six o'clock.

He was a magnificent beast, with a perfect horn 57 inches along the curve, and 20 inches in circumference at the base. But there was no time to waste, for night was upon us, and camp was a long way off. I sent off Pombo to fetch the ponies from the hollow where we had tethered them, and occupied the interim in skinning and cutting up the beasts. By the time we had loaded up the horns and turned our heads towards camp it was quite dark, and for the next two hours

we picked our way at funereal pace over ground which it was often as much as I cared to do to ride over in broad daylight. But what did that matter while I had a 57-inch ammon head tied on at the back of my saddle! What did it matter if I did not reach camp until ten o'clock, after 15½ hours of toil over mountains of shale! The joy which it is given to the hunter to know is deep, and I was tasting it to the full. I even abstained from railing at Pombo for trying to persuade me to turn back early in the day!

It would be easy to dwell at length upon every stalk which I enjoyed during my sojourn in Mongolia, for the details of every one are all burned deep into my memory; but it would be as tedious for my readers as it would be easy for me. The ammon are plentiful, and big heads are far from being scarce, though owing to the bareness of the ground they are difficult to approach. The extraordinary weight of the horns of an old ram seems to be a handicap in the race for life, a fact which the packs of wolves which frequent the country no doubt thoroughly appreciate. I came across a regular Golgotha one day, many of the horns being in excellent preservation, and carried off a horn measuring 58 inches from among them. Looking round through my field-glasses I lit upon a pack of wolves on a hillside not far off, and counted no less than eleven in one place. No doubt it is largely due to the presence of these beasts and to their carnivorous tendencies that the rams are always so much on the alert and so sensitive to the presence of danger.

Camp-life is pleasant enough, if you are not averse to a little cold, for except for occasional snowstorms—which, however, are indescribable while they last!—I found the climate fine and dry. The cold in the

winter must be intense, for on August the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th the thermometer registered 22°, 19°, 7°, and 15° of frost respectively, and I observed on the first of these days that it was freezing 15° while I was partaking of breakfast. I was fortunate enough to secure another ram on that day, with a very fine head measuring 55 inches and 20 inches in circumference, though I came across him quite by accident when starting to stalk a herd which I had spied some distance away.

A more exciting and even more satisfactory day was the 20th, on which I was lucky enough to secure a right-and-left, both rams carrying horns over 50 inches in length! Not, however, before I had passed through some anxious moments. The first ram fell dead to the shot, struck at the base of the neck, but the second went gaily away with a broken hind-leg; and a ram with a broken leg is, as I very soon found out, by no means an easy beast to get on terms with, especially when you have the inherent stupidity of two Kalmuks combined to reckon with as well.

Having watched him till he lay down, I pointed him out to Pombo, gave him the glass, and impressed upon him by signs and forcible expressions that I desired him to remain where he was to keep an eye on the wounded ram, while I proceeded to stalk him. I then started off, but I had reckoned without Kalmuk number 2, who seized the opportunity before I had gone very far of leading a white pony along the sky-line behind us. Of course the ram was up and away like a flash; but he soon lay down again, this time mercifully out of sight of both Kalmuks, who evidently imagined that he had gone off for good, and set to work to skin and cut up the dead beast. I marked down the spot where he was lying, and then went off as hard as I could to

get round him. There was a valley to be crossed and a long climb up a steep shaley mountain-side to be effected, and it was not till an hour later that I found myself crawling down towards the spot which I had so carefully marked. To my satisfaction I was soon able to make out a horn straight down below me, and I knew that he was still there. A few more yards and I should be in a position to shoot; but the next moment, to my consternation, I saw the ram spring up and bolt, and looking for some cause I descried the evil features of Pombo appearing over a ridge straight in front of me! He was evidently blissfully ignorant of the presence either of myself or of the wounded ram, but there was no time to be lost, and, running on to a slight eminence, I apprised him of the position by emptying the contents of the magazine after the flying beast. By a stroke of good luck I brought him down, and the next minute was standing exultant beside him. He carried a fine horn of 51 inches, and as the first also had a horn of just over 50 inches, I congratulated myself on bringing my trip after wild sheep to a highly satisfactory conclusion.

The following day, August 21, I stayed in camp packing the horns and head-skins, and making various preparations for leaving the country on the morrow. I had been out shooting exactly fourteen days, and during that time had shot ten rams and a gazelle, an excellent bag, considering the bare nature of the country and the wildness of the game. I need hardly add, perhaps, that we had worked hard to secure this result. Personally I had not taken a rest once during the fortnight, and the day's work cannot have averaged less than fourteen hours during the whole of that time, my habit being to leave camp at 5 or 6 A.M. and to get back again by dark or as soon after as possible.

KALMUK BRINGING HOME AN AMMON.

The trophies which I had secured were all fine heads, with the exception of one small one which I discarded, and included four heads of over 50 inches, as follows: 50¾, 51, 55, and 57 inches; the measurements of the six best heads given in the latest edition of Mr Rowland Ward's 'Horn Measurements' being 62, 60, 59½, 59, 56½, and 55 inches.

On the 22nd, I bade farewell to my Mongol soldier, who, by the way, had just concluded an agreement with my Kalmuks to meet them at a spot known to them in the mountains on the frontier, with 30 bricks of tea, for which he was to be paid 25 roubles. By thus evading the vigilance of the Russian Custom officials at Kosh-Agach they no doubt expected to do a good stroke of business, the price of this particular brand of tea in Russia amounting to 1 rouble 40 kopecks per brick.

Two days later I reached Kosh-Agach, whence a march of eight days brought me to the Russian village of Onguidai. Here I was able to get post-horses again, and reached Biisk on wheels in five days more, taking steamer from here down the river Ob to the Siberian railway.

SIBERIA AND ITS RAILWAY

"Clime of the East! that to the hunter's bow
And roving herds of savage men wert sold—
Their cone-roofed wigwams pierced the wintry snow,
Their tasselled corn crept sparsely through the mould,
Their bark canoes thy glorious waters clave,
The chase their glory and the wild their grave—
Look up! a loftier destiny behold."

—L. H. SIGOURNEY.

"Railroad iron is a magician's rod, in its power to evoke the sleeping energies of land and water."—R. W. EMERSON.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CENTRAL SIBERIA.

The Government of Tomsk—The Altai mining district—Nature of the country—An agricultural land—Three years' famine—The fallow-land system—Absence of English-made goods—The reason—The Siberian village—The Siberian peasant—The vodka curse—The Government vodka monopoly—Vodka statistics—Barnaul—A general store—The Altai highlands—Kosh-Agach—Russo-Mongol trade—The city of Tomsk—The mystery of Tomsk—Feodor Kuzmitch—The mysterious death of Alexander I.—"Alexander's House" at Tomsk—The university and technological institute—Population and position.

IMMEDIATELY north of the region of "steppe borderland," known as Semipalatinsk, lies that portion of Siberia embraced by the government of Tomsk. Bounded on the west and north-west by the Akmolinsk territory and the Tobolsk government, and on the east and north-east by Mongolia and the Yeniseisk government, it comprises an area of upwards of 331,000 square miles, or, to give a better idea, is one and a half times as large as France. Through the centre of this province runs the middle link of the great Siberian railway, and south of the line are situated four of the seven unequal divisions into which, for purposes of internal administration, it is divided, known as the Barnaul, Biisk, Kuznetsk, and Zeminogorsk districts, forming the property of his Imperial Majesty's Cabinet under the name of the Altai mining district. This property, already one of the richest in

Siberia, is certain to advance still further in importance, especially when the proposed Tomsk-Tashkent railway is taken in hand, and merits a few words of description.

The surface of the country is varied, a vast level plain constituting the western and northern portions, while on the east and south-east rise ranges of the Altai Mountains. Throughout the lowlands rich black earth, which has proved to be the most fertile soil of Siberia, abounds, and hence doubtless the attraction which has brought settlers to these parts in such large numbers during recent years. For long, attempts were made to protect the Altai lands from the intrusion of immigrants; but since 1865, when the district was first opened to colonisation, the influx of settlers has steadily increased, as many as 300,000 being said to have settled in the Cabinet lands of his Majesty within the last ten years of the past century. Agriculture is consequently the predominant occupation of the people, and though only a fraction of the total arable land is sown, a large surplus of grain is available in normal years for export to Eastern Siberia and other parts of the empire. The recent three years' famine caused by drought has therefore been a severe blow to the prosperity of the country, and though the harvest of 1903 promised to be a fair one, it could only go a part of the way towards recompensing the settlers for the heavy loss which they have recently sustained. But later events—the war in the Far East—are likely to bring about a still greater measure of depression, if, as is probable, troops are to be levied in Siberia, a proceeding which, in the opinion of well-qualified judges, would mean the depopulation of whole villages.

The system of husbandry adopted is characterised by the fallow-land system, and to the eye of the English-

IN THE SIBERIAN ALTAI.

man, accustomed to the neat enclosures of an agricultural district in his own country, which once led an American critic to describe it as having the appearance of being finished with a pencil rather than with a plough, the land has a ragged and untidy appearance. Hedges and ditches there are none, but patches of corn alternate with tracts of grass or waste land, with no apparent method or order. Driving from the foot of the Altai Mountains to the town of Biisk, a distance of upwards of fifty miles, in September, I received the impression of passing over a continuous patch-work quilt, masses of golden corn shining in a setting of grass and flowers, alternating with patches of newly-stacked hay.

There are no signs of manure of any sort being in use, the fertility of the soil, and the vast amount of virgin land merely awaiting the plough, being conducive no doubt to apathy and carelessness on the part of the farmer with regard to the future. "The land," as Mr Simpson remarks, "is very rich, and there is a royal waste of everything—of time, of space, of natural products."[1] Your Siberian peasant sows his seed and then sits down and placidly waits for it to grow and ripen. It does not seem to occur to him, as it does to the onlooker, that however fertile the soil the phosphates must some time become exhausted, and that however plentiful the virgin land, a day will come when its limit will have been reached. When these things come to pass he will doubtless learn wisdom; in the meantime he is blissfully content.

This is not all that strikes the Englishman, however, if he happens to be of an observant turn of mind. For to any one who takes the trouble to note it, the absence of English-made agricultural implements is painfully

[1] Sidelights on Siberia. J. Y. Simpson.

obvious. Ploughs that are not of Russian manufacture bear the names of American and German firms, while M'Cormick reapers and Deering mowers bear witness on all sides to the success which has attended the energy and enterprise of our cousins across the Atlantic. Siberia is a vast agricultural country, which must offer a steadily increasing market for agricultural machinery —a fact which does not seem to have been appreciated by our own manufacturers. So, as I found before long, with everything else. You may travel far in Siberia with the fixed intention of finding something of English make, and fail. I think a Merryweather fire-engine, the chemical balances used in the gold-smelting laboratory at Irkutsk, and the "Morgan" crucibles of world renown used in the same place, about exhaust the list of English articles which I saw.

And when you begin to wonder why, and to search for the reason, you are reluctantly compelled to admit that the fault lies at our own door. No trouble is taken to comply with the requirements of the people. Catalogues, when they are sent at all, are almost invariably sent in English—I know of only one honourable exception—and might just as well be written in Sanskrit.[1] Specimens of the article required are refused, a ridiculous economy, since nothing will induce the Siberian to buy what he is unable first to see working for himself; and further, long credits, which are invariable in the country, are rigorously tabooed. So the wily German and the astute American "traveller" steps in, and before we realise what has occurred the market is gone.

[1] The same lament comes from other quarters. Compare the report of the British Vice-Consul at Resht for 1902-3, in which he states that catalogues sent to him from the United Kingdom are in the majority of cases useless, owing to the fact that Persians cannot read them.

A SIBERIAN VILLAGE.

After agriculture the rearing of live-stock forms an important element in the husbandry of the country, horses, cattle, and sheep being raised in large numbers, especially in the Barnaul and Biisk districts. Bee-keeping, too, is largely practised, enormous quantities of honey and wax being produced in the Biisk and Zeminogorsk districts, and when travelling through the country I often obtained excellent honey from the villagers. The villages are invariably composed of wooden houses built of rough unsquared logs, moss and earth being forced into the interstices to keep out the cold. The windows are double for the same reason —a good enough reason, too, when we remember that the thermometer drops to 70° below zero (Fahrenheit), without causing surprise to any one.[1] Originality plays no part in their construction, one being like unto another; "indeed," to quote Mr Simpson once more, "they only differ in one respect—their linear extent; otherwise they are all at the same stage of development." I saw the interiors of many such dwellings, often spending the night in the house of some villager when travelling, and was struck with the uniformity of their appearance. The rooms, of which there were generally two or three, were always furnished on the most simple plan — a table standing against a bare wall, a few chairs, and a large wooden bed piled up with cushions and blankets, constituting the bed- and sitting-room, while a huge whitewashed brick stove and oven combined monopolised the greater part of the other, which served as kitchen. The walls were seldom adorned with anything beyond an ikon and print of the Tsar and Tsaritsa, and never once did I see a sign of those odds and ends, such as ornaments,

[1] At Novo Nicholaewsk on the Siberian railway the greatest amount of cold registered is usually 46° Reamur = 103° of frost Fahrenheit.

pictures, photographs, &c., which make the *lares* and *penates* of an English cottage.

The villager himself is a sad-looking man, which is, perhaps, not to be wondered at, for he only reflects the circumstances of his existence. The excessive length of his hair and the fulness of his bushy beard give him a somewhat wild and uncouth appearance, and his mirth is as brief as the short summer he enjoys, the usual hard expression which he wears being but a reflex of the long gloomy winter which broods over his land. He wears a cotton blouse, generally of scarlet, or one of the many shades which scarlet assumes under the influence of sun and rain on its road to an ultimate neutral tint, thick baggy trousers, whose shape is the result of chance rather than design, and the ends of which are tucked into big top-boots made for comfort rather than for elegance. In addition to a trouser end, a long-stemmed pipe is, as a rule, kept in one, and a wad of tobacco, rolled up in an indescribable rag, in the other, besides other small odds and ends which might be found in an ordinary being's pockets. He gets solemnly drunk on vodka when he has nothing better to do, which is mostly, and is apt to become aggressive under its influence.

Vodka, indeed, is likely to prove the curse of Siberia. I have related in a previous chapter how the postmaster one Sunday evening told me he would bring the blacksmith to repair my tarantass *if he was not drunk*, and on another occasion I found the postmaster himself gloriously intoxicated at nine o'clock in the morning. Once in the small town of Zeminogorsk I came to blows with an inebriated peasant, and narrowly escaped being locked up by an officious police-officer for setting upon an inoffensive (?) subject of the Tsar! To prove that I was not the victim of chance, it is only

necessary to have recourse to the writings of other travellers in Russia and Siberia. Mr Henry Norman, for instance, writes of the Russian peasant that "he gets wildly drunk at Easter for joy to think that Christ is risen, and at other times for no reason at all";[1] while Mr Simpson, in his 'Sidelights on Siberia,' records that "Sunday evening is usually spent in rioting and drunkenness. . . . From Tomsk onwards it was not once or twice merely that we passed men lying in the centre of the village road; and often late in the evening small groups of inebriates stumbled along the uneven track, unduly emphasising with each loss of balance sundry snatches of their weird minor airs."

It has been suggested by some that the Government vodka monopoly, which is gradually being introduced throughout the Russian Empire, will tend to lessen drunkenness. I am bound to admit that I am quite unable to agree with this far too sanguine expectation. To begin with, where the monopoly is in force, vodka may not be consumed on the premises where it is sold. Result: the peasant cannot buy a glass of vodka, so he buys a bottle, walks outside, empties the bottle (down his throat!), returns to the shop, and receives back value in money for the empty bottle. At the settlement of Novo Nicholaewsk—of which more anon—the monopoly came into force in November 1902. In the course of the first ten months the takings amounted to 1½ million roubles! That is to say, taking fifty kopecks a pint as the average price paid for vodka, the amount consumed in ten months was 375,000 gallons! I have secured the figures for the province of Moscow, with a population of just under 2½ millions, during the year 1902, which are equally instructive. Six hundred and eleven Government

[1] All the Russias.

shops retailed 8,139,530 gallons of vodka, having a total value of £3,242,341, the clear profit amounting to £2,410,568. This shows an increase of profit over the previous year of £1,252,528, or nearly 100 per cent! Excellent for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, no doubt, though hardly an inspiring outlook from the temperance point of view. What a pity the anti-compensationists—*et hoc genus omne*—don't live in Russia!

But my discussions on the Russian peasant and his faults are carrying me away from the subject in hand, which is the government of Tomsk. If the villages are severe in their simplicity, the towns show signs of a higher ambition. Barnaul, capital of the district of the same name, comes as a surprise. Here large buildings of brick and stone are plentiful, there are broad streets and commodious shops, a substantial, almost magnificent, Government House rises in the centre of the town, and the churches, of course, form conspicuous objects. Altogether, the town wears an air of prosperity and progress. Houses of wood still exist in parts, but in many places these may be seen in process of demolition, while superior buildings of brick are rising, phœnix-like, from their ashes. I went into one of the chief shops, which displayed an assortment of goods from bicycles to tooth-brushes. A map was my modest requirement, and a courteous shop-walker sent off an assistant to unearth the maps from the stationery department. In the meantime, was there anything else he could show me? He had several excellent gramophones, recently imported—there were half a dozen on the counter, one of which was braying forth what I took to be a Russian comic song, in the harsh metallic cadence common to gramophones. No, I was in no need of a gramophone at the moment. Well, then, a

bicycle or revolver? No, I did not require the former, and was already provided with the latter. I saw machinery, tools, glass-ware, silver-ware, jewellery, hats, clothes, boots, toilet accessories, saddlery, oilman's stores, and confectionery looming large behind gramophone, bicycle, and revolver; but fortunately the maps were produced at this moment, and I was spared further inspection of goods for which I had no possible use.

Beyond Barnaul, that is to say higher up the river, is Biisk, which is Barnaul on a smaller scale, with electric light and a bishop's house thrown in, and beyond Biisk rise the wooded slopes and snow-clad peaks of the Altai highlands. The face of the country here assumes a complete change. You pass from a level almost treeless plain into a land of woods and mountains, of rushing streams and frost-bound heights, of lovely valleys, where grass and wild-flowers grow in riotous profusion, and where villages nestle snugly in sheltered hollows. Agriculture is less conspicuous here; herds of horses and flocks of sheep form the wealth of the people, and trapping and hunting are among their favourite occupations. The last Russian village of any importance is Onguidai, 250 versts from Biisk, beyond which the population is reduced to wandering Kalmuks, who live scattered widely over the country in round felt tents. After travelling for 500 versts from Biisk, yet another change comes over the land, tree-life ceases abruptly, agriculture becomes quite impossible, and you debouch on to a bare bleak plateau on the Mongolian frontier.

Kosh-Agach—such is the name of the district we have reached—began with a church, erected upwards of thirty years ago for the benefit of the Kalmuk converts to orthodoxy. Then the prospect of trade with the

Mongols attracted the merchant, who built him wooden houses on the banks of the Chuya river. Now there are ten merchants, forming a little colony on the edge of the bleak plateau, pushing their trade into Mongolia, and buying the produce of that country in return. Manufactured and millinery goods, iron and copper wares, tanned leather and maral horns pass into Mongolia, and in return furs, wool, skins, brick tea, silk stuffs, and small wares of Chinese manufacture are brought into Russia. This trade, which has so far attained a value of only a few hundred thousand roubles, is likely to show an increased development before long, since the authorities have been engaged during the past two years in constructing a road, at a cost of 65,000 roubles (roughly £6500), from Onguidai, which is now sufficiently near completion to admit of the passage of light vehicles for the whole distance to the frontier, whence a caravan route leads to Kobdo, Uliissatai, and Urga, the chief centres of Mongolian trade.[1] At present Mongolia can only be described as a poor country; but a great future lies before it when

[1] Since writing these words, I learn from Siberia that the road has already given a considerable impetus to Russian trade with Mongolia, whence increasing quantities of sheep's wool, camel hair, prepared felt, hides, and skins are being obtained. Trade with this country is also being stimulated by the opening up of a water route *vid* the lower Irtish, the Nor-Zaisan Lake, and the Black Irtish river, up which steamers and barges have now been run for three years in succession by three merchants of Semipalatinsk, who have established a station at the mouth of the Kaldjir river, a tributary of the Black Irtish. In the course of last season 8000 tons of merchandise were thus carried, and two new steamers are being built with a Government subsidy, to be launched in the present year. The present station at the mouth of the Kaldjir river is 45 miles from the Russian town of Zaisansk, 150 miles from the Mongolian town of Tchugutchak and 375 miles from Kobdo. A party of surveyors and scientists were under orders to proceed on an expedition of exploration with a view to finding the best route to this latter town; but owing to the outbreak of war and the consequent withdrawal of all extraordinary expenditure on the part of the Government the expedition has been postponed.

THE NEW RUSSIAN ROAD TO MONGOLIA.

the untold mineral wealth of which it is known to be possessed comes to be extracted from the bosom of the earth, and it requires no great powers of perception to perceive to whom the bulk of it will fall.

Such in brief is the Government of Tomsk, a vast territory embracing some of the richest and most prosperous tracts of Siberia, or rather, I should perhaps say, those parts of Tomsk which I had opportunities of visiting. I have given some description of the country and its people; it remains for me before concluding this chapter to say a few words about its capital.

Tomsk—so called from its situation on the river Tom—has a mystery of its own, but it is in no way connected with the railway. The so-called mystery of the railway,—why Tomsk, the university town, the most populous city in Siberia, and prospective capital of 5,000,000 square miles of territory, was severely left on one side when the great railway came to be built,—is in reality no mystery at all, least of all to the inhabitants of the city concerned. The said inhabitants were proud—their position they thought was unassailable—and they shouted defiance at the engineers when they demanded their price for including Tomsk in their scheme of railway construction. But they forgot that they were in Russia and were dealing with Russian engineers, so Tomsk was left out in the cold, and is to this day left at the terminus of a branch 59 miles from the main line. Now they would willingly give twice the amount originally demanded, but it is too late. The whole business is not a creditable one, and casts a serious reflection on the honour of the engineers who built the line, and perhaps the less said about it the better.

The real mystery of Tomsk centres round the tomb of a pious hermit, one Feodor Kuzmitch, who died in 1864,

and was buried by the monks of the Alexis monastery in the town, leaving behind him a memory which at the present day is held in reverent awe by the people. But there was something more than the extreme piety and asceticism of his life to excite the worship which is now accorded him; and herein lies the mystery, for there is no doubt whatsoever that, whoever the wanderer who reached Tomsk in 1849 to make it his final home may in reality have been, the vast majority of its inhabitants are firmly convinced that in the person of the lonely monk there was living among them no less a personage than the abdicated monarch, Alexander I.

The story is one of absorbing interest, and is worthy of a foremost place among those strange romances with which the annals of Russian history are fraught.

As far as recorded history goes, we are led to believe that Alexander I. died in November, in the year 1825, at the town of Taganrog, whither he had repaired for the benefit of his health. But, as is not unusually the case in the history of Russia, there is much that requires explanation and elucidation in connection with what is described by the historian Rambaud as "the premature and mysterious death of Alexander." The circumstances attendant on his departure from his capital are sufficiently strange. "At the moment of his departure he appears to have been shaken by gloomy presentiments, and insisted on a requiem mass being said at the monastery of Saint Alexander Nevski. In broad daylight, lighted tapers were left in his room. . . . At Taganrog Alexander received circumstantial accounts as to the conspiracy of the Society of the South and its schemes of regicide. Cruel recollections of 1801 may have mingled with his melancholy. He thought sadly of the terrible embarrassments which he would bequeath to his successor; of his lost illusions; of his liberal

sympathies of former days, which in Poland, as in Russia, had ended in a reaction; of his broken purposes and changed life."[1]

His body was of course carried to St Petersburg for burial, but the people of Tomsk will tell you that spurious corpses are easy to obtain in Russia, and that whosoever it may have been, it was not the body of Alexander over which was read the royal funeral service of 1825. An old Cossack officer told Mr Simpson that he was a boy in St Petersburg at the time when the remains of the deceased emperor were brought up from the south; and that he remembered distinctly how it was quite openly remarked that the body was not that of Alexander, and how it was a cause of comment at the time that people were not allowed to pass by and look on the face of their late emperor as he lay in state, according to custom;[2] and I was told stories to the same effect in Tomsk. So much for the accredited history of the death of Alexander. Now for the version which is not to be found in the chronicles of recognised historians.

Not very long after the supposed death of that monarch, a vagrant, having in his possession a horse of a quality which did not, in the opinion of the police, coincide with his humble status, turned up on the eastern borders of Russia, and, as he refused to explain how he came by his property, was beaten and despatched across the frontier to Siberia. The first years of his life in that country were spent in the neighbourhood of Krasnoyarsk; but in 1832 he moved to a village twenty miles from Tomsk, where he lived a retired and ascetic life for seventeen years. In 1849 he came to Tomsk itself, to spend the remainder of his life amid the humble

[1] History of Russia. Alfred Rambaud.
[2] Sidelights on Siberia. J. Y. Simpson.

surroundings of a small wooden house, 18 ft. by 20 ft., which is known to this day as "Alexander's House." The simple furniture he used is still preserved, but the simplicity and gloom of the apartment are now relieved by many gilded ikons, and by portraits of Alexander I. and Feodor Kuzmitch, placed side by side to accentuate their strong resemblance. The place is looked upon as holy ground, a shed has been raised over the whole building to protect it, and services are held there every Sunday.

Papers proving his identity are said to have been taken to St Petersburg after his death at his own request by his landlord, Khromov; and I was told of a curious incident which is likewise held to be proof of his being no other than the abdicated monarch.

While heir to the throne, it is asserted that Alexander II., during his tour in Siberia, visited the lonely monk near Krasnoyarsk. For long he was closeted with him, until at length the curiosity of the village priest, in whose house the interview took place, could no longer be restrained, and gazing through the key-hole he saw to his astonishment the heir to the throne of all the Russias humbly kneeling before the mysterious monk!

Be the story right or wrong, no amount of argument, however forcible, will persuade Siberia that she was not the unwitting host of a royal guest; and almost the last thing I saw in Tomsk was a humble citizen bowing and praying before the small chapel which is now being erected above the grave of the deceased ascetic.

But even without a mystery Tomsk would be a notable town. It has a university—the only one at present in Siberia—with faculties for medicine and jurisprudence, and the prospect of others to come, attended at the time of my visit by 600 students. It has

botanical and zoological museums. It boasts of its electric light and telephones, and it parades before you rows of massive buildings, which are in reality composed of brick and stucco, but which look like stone. It provides fine shops for you, and is building arcades; it has theatres and hotels, and, last but not least, it is possessed of a technological institute of which any city in the world might be proud. This latter building is magnificent. It is four storeys high, and covers a large area of ground on both sides of a wide street. Drawing and elementary instruction had been started for three years; chemistry was being begun when I was there, and physical science and mineralogy were shortly to be embarked upon. Buildings for engineering were being added, and altogether it was expected that additions would be made during the next five years. The whole institute is lighted with electric light and artificially heated, and the laboratories are fitted with all the latest appliances from German manufactories.

I have said much that is good about Tomsk: there are some things that are bad also. The shops are inordinately expensive, and the streets and roads recall the horrors of Constantinople. But on the whole Tomsk has every right to be proud. Its 50,000 inhabitants place it alongside of Irkutsk, as the two most popular cities in Siberia, and its university will ensure its remaining one of the chief cities of the country, even should its present unfortunate position involve its decline in commercial activity before others more fortunately placed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GREAT SIBERIAN RAILWAY.

The spirit of discovery of the sixteenth century—Yermak—The conquest of Siberia—The treaty of Nertchinsk—Count Muravieff—Need of communications in Siberia—Early railway schemes—The Perm-Tiumen line built—The imperial rescript of March 1891—The cost of the Siberian railway—The price of a ticket—Western Siberia—The settlement of Novo Nicholaewsk—Dairy-farming—The junction for Tomsk—Deficiencies of the railway track—The monotony of the journey—Irkutsk—Its origin—Its present position—Its chief buildings—The gold-smelting laboratory.

THE sixteenth century is one which has left an indelible mark in the annals of Western nations. The spirit of unrest which had long lain dormant in the peoples of Europe burst forth simultaneously in half-a-dozen countries, impelling men irresistibly to leave their homes and penetrate to the uttermost ends of the earth. A veritable lust for discovery set in, fostering in the hearts of the intrepid adventurers of the day seed which was destined to give birth in due course to the empires of the world. So it happened that while the world was still marvelling at the discoveries of John Cabot and Christopher Columbus beyond the Western seas, and speculating on the possibilities opened up by the successful outcome of the daring voyage of Vasco da Gama in the East, there arose, in a wild and lawless district bordering the banks of the Volga and the Don, a man who was destined to set

going on its long career the natural tendency of the Slav race towards the East, and by force of character and his own extraordinary personality to start the rapidly awakening power of Russia[1] on the thorny road to empire.

Vassil, the son of Timothy Povolski, known to the world by his curious nickname, Yermak (millstone), given him by his fellow-boatmen, pervaded by the same spirit of unrest which was stirring the pulses of Western Europe, early developed from boatman into Cossack chief, a synonym in those days for pirate king. A career of successful piracy on the Volga was brought to an abrupt termination when news of the doings of the chief and his desperadoes was brought to the ears of Ivan the Terrible, who, incensed at such flagrant defiance of law and order, despatched an army to put an end to the freebooters. Thus does the fate of men and nations hang ever on the trend of small events. Driven from his former haunts, compelled to seek safety on the confines of the country, the pirate chief came under the eye of the merchants Stroganoff, already grown rich and powerful on possessions on the Kama; and entering their service, volunteered to lead an expedition for them across the Urals in quest of the rich furs of the coveted land of Yugra. On New Year's Day 1581 (then September 1st), he started at the head of 800 men for the unknown land beyond the mountains: in less than two years he had won an empire for his sovereign and a pardon for himself. Such was the beginning of the movement which has given five million square miles to a Russian Tsar, and won for a nation still young—fit compensation for the stormy days of childhood passed under the galling yoke

[1] The first man to assume the title of autocrat of all Russia was Ivan III., son of Vassil II., Grand Duke of Vladimir, a century before (1462).

of the Golden Horde—the proud heritage of one of the greatest empires of the world!

The story of the exploits of Yermak up to the day of his violent death in the frenzied waters of the Irtish, while trying to swim to safety from a disastrous night-attack at the hands of his old enemy, the Tartar chief Kutchum, and of the daring feats and heroic endurance of the Cossack bands who took up the task thus started, as they pressed steadfastly on towards the East, harassed by the savage tribes they encountered, cut off by vast stretches of inhospitable country from their base, and exposed to the rigour of the terrible Siberian winter, is one of surpassing interest, but one which it would be beyond the scope of the present chapter to portray. Suffice it to say that little less than half a century after Yermak had led his band across the Urals, thanks to the dauntless courage and perseverance of these pioneers, the limit of the continent was reached on the Sea of Okhotsk; while, in strong contrast to this activity and progress in the north, stands the indifference of the Government at Moscow and the incompetence of their envoy in the Amur region on the south, who, baffled by the ability of a Jesuit priest,[1] signed away the ground won under exceptional difficulties by a succession of heroes, and put a check upon Russian expansion in the direction of the Pacific, which was only removed a century and a half later by the genius of a man who did for Russia in the Far East all and more than Yermak had done for her in the West.

[1] The treaty of Nertchinsk, the first ever concluded by China with a foreign power, was signed in 1689 by the Russian envoy Golovin and the Jesuit fathers, Gerbillon and Pereira, who accompanied the Chinese Plenipotentiary. By its terms Russia gave up the Amur and retired behind the river Gorbitza, the line of mountains bounding on the north the basin of the Amur and the river Argun.

Count Muravieff, appointed Governor-General of Eastern Siberia in 1847, broke the long spell of inactivity which had sterilised Russian enterprise east of the Baikal for 160 years, and, in spite of violent opposition from headquarters, and innumerable obstacles on the spot, succeeded, before he laid down his staff of office, in wiping out the inglorious treaty of Nertchinsk, in bringing the whole of the Amur region under the yoke of Russia, and establishing her firmly on the Pacific seaboard as far south as the borders of Korea, thus putting the finishing touches to the great movement begun three centuries before, which has had for effect the inclusion of half a continent in the dominions of the Tsar.

I have given this short sketch of the Conquest of Siberia because it explains the circumstances which have led up to the subject of this chapter, the construction of the greatest railway which the world has seen. Towns and villages followed in the wake of Cossack pioneers, and with the establishment of a sedentary form of occupation, the necessity of improved communication, without which the administration of law and order in such wide regions was impossible, forced itself upon the attention of the central Government at St Petersburg.[1] Post-roads, such as still afford the only means of communication in many parts of Asiatic Russia, were inaugurated, stretching from town to town, until the links were at length forged into a great chain, which reached across Asia from the Urals to the Pacific. Later on a further advance was made by the introduction of steam traffic on the principal

[1] The centre of administration was moved from Moscow to St Petersburg in the days of Peter the Great, who assumed the reins of government on September 12, 1689, a fortnight after the conclusion of the treaty of Nertchinsk.

waterways of Siberia, and when at last a man arose to put fresh life-blood into the stagnant veins of Russian activity in the East, it was in great measure due to the defects inevitably attaching to the navigation of rivers themselves frozen for half the year, flowing into a remote and almost impracticable sea, that the project of constructing railways, to at least assist existing communications, took definite shape.

The earliest definite suggestion seems to have come from an English engineer, who proposed to build a gigantic horse tramway, extending from Nijni-Novgorod to the Pacific Ocean; but, as Mr Henry Norman remarks, "it is not surprising that the Russian Government passed over in silence so fantastic a scheme, unsupported by any estimates."[1] Another proposal made in the same year was that of Colonel Romanoff, for a carriage-road, to be transformed later into a railway, between Sophiisk on the Amur and De Castries Bay. The idea of railway communication having once taken root, a whole host of proposals of varying merit immediately sprang up, including one by an American, Collins, to unite Irkutsk and Chita; a gigantic scheme for traversing the whole region by three Englishmen, Morrison, Horn, and Sleigh; and the equally colossal project of Sophronoff, to build a line from Saratof across the Steppe *viâ* Semipalatinsk to the Amur and Peking.

After this many schemes of a less ambitious nature were propounded, the first tangible result appearing in the shape of a line built solely to satisfy the demands of the Ural mining industry, a special commission,

[1] In his 'Peoples and Politics of the Far East.' The facts concerning the proposals for and eventual construction of the trans-Siberian railway are taken from the above book, Vladimir's 'Russia on the Pacific,' and the official 'Guide to the Great Siberian Railway.'

CROSSING A RIVER IN SIBERIA.

organised for the purpose of selecting the most suitable route to satisfy the requirements of the mining industry and Siberian transport, having come to the conclusion that the two interests were incompatible. This line, projected by Colonel Bogdanovitch, had for its starting-point Perm, and reaching Ekaterinburg in 1878 was completed as far as Tiumen in 1884; and it was not until 1891 that the much-discussed scheme for a great trans-continental railway was finally decided on. By this time there were three lines, any one of which could be extended east beyond the Urals, and the choice eventually adopted was made in accordance with a detailed note presented by the then Minister of Ways and Communications, State Secretary Von Hubbenet, on November 15, 1890.

After pointing out that the possible points of departure of a trans-Siberian line to Nizhneudinsk were (1) Tiumen on the Ural line, (2) Orenburg on the Orenburg line, and (3) Mias on the Zlatoust-Mias line, he demonstrated the advantages of a line starting from the last-named as being the shortest from Moscow, the cheapest to construct, and the one passing through the most populous localities of Western Siberia; while he objected to the Orenburg line on the grounds of its great length and cost owing to technical difficulties, and to the Tiumen line as necessitating the further construction of a costly line of 1000 versts from Perm to Nijni-Novgorod to preserve its commercial importance. Urged by the Ministers of War and Foreign Affairs, he also attached great importance to the construction of the Ussuri line for connecting Vladivostok with the Amur Basin, which, at the instigation of Count Ignatieff and Baron Korf, had already been sanctioned by the Emperor in 1887.

As a result of these representations, the Committee

of Ministers issued an order, sanctioned by the Emperor, in February 1891, (1) to approve the direction of the Ussuri line from Vladivostok to Grafskaya station, (2) to commence the construction of the Mias-Cheliabinsk line in 1891, and (3) to conduct surveys in the same year from Cheliabinsk to Tomsk or some other point of the mid-Siberian section, and from the terminus of the first section of the Ussuri line to Kharbarovsk, and by an imperial rescript issued in March 1891 the question of the construction of the great Trans-Siberian railway was definitely settled.

It must be admitted that in constructing a line across Asia, Russia has become responsible for one of the achievements of the world. An English officer, whose lot has been cast for the most part in the East, once said to me that Russia had done two big things—she had carried on the Russo-Turkish war and she had built the Siberian railway, and there can be few who will deny that, as far at any rate as the latter is concerned, he was undoubtedly correct. In little more than ten years 6000 miles of railway have been built, and the journey from London to Shanghai, even with the present imperfect running, has been reduced from upwards of a month *viâ* the Suez Canal to nineteen days. The cost has, of course, been enormous—far greater indeed than it ought to have been, and the estimate rose as the line progressed. At one time £40,000,000 was suggested as the probable cost of the undertaking; but by the end of 1899 £53,000,000 had already been spent, and the total official estimate rose to £82,500,000. By the end of last year (1903) even this stupendous sum had been exceeded, and an official publication, commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Imperial Committee of the Siberian Railway, was issued, which placed the total cost of the line through

Siberia and Manchuria to Vladivostok and Port Arthur at 940,000,000 odd roubles, or £99,000,000, which works out at something like £16,600 per mile. This will have still to be added to by the time that the difficult circum-Baikal branch is completed.

Travelling is luxuriant in the extreme, the carriages—particularly the newest ones, which have been constructed for the Trans-Baikal and Manchurian sections—being very high and roomy, fitted with electric light, a movable electric reading-lamp, and electric bells, and being connected by a corridor with a smoking saloon, dining saloon, and bathroom. Small plate-glass flanges are fitted at right angles to the windows, which prevent sparks, &c., blowing in when open, and electric fans give additional ventilation when required in the smoking and dining car. With all these comforts you naturally expect to have to pay handsomely for the privilege of travelling on the line, and it comes as a surprise to you when you learn the ridiculously low price of a ticket. It was originally officially predicted that the cost of a first-class ticket by fast train, inclusive of government tax and sleeping accommodation, from Moscow to Port Arthur, a distance of something like 5300 miles, would be 114 roubles, or a fraction over £12, and, though this estimate has in point of fact been largely exceeded, the present price of 270 roubles 78 kopecks, or £28, 16s., can only be described as exceedingly moderate. There is, however, one thing which it struck me might be altered with advantage, not only to the passengers but also to the receipts of the railway, and that is, the time of duration of a through ticket. When it is remembered that forty-five days are allowed for the journey on a through ticket from London to St Petersburg, it strikes one as a little absurd that twenty-four days should be the limit

allowed for the journey from Moscow to Port Arthur, and fifteen and eleven from the two chief towns in Siberia—namely, Tomsk and Irkutsk. It is to be hoped that the authorities will see their way before long to remove so annoying and unnecessary a limitation.

The following list of fares may be of interest to the traveller :—

			Class.	Francs.	£	s.	d.
London to Port Arthur	*viâ*	Calais	1st	1024·65	40	12	5
		„	2nd	693·40	27	9	9
		Ostend	1st	1013·70	40	3	7
		„	2nd	685·65	27	3	7
London to Vladivostok	„	Calais	1st	944·20	37	8	7
		„	2nd	642·60	25	9	5
		Ostend	1st	933·25	36	19	9
		„	2nd	635·85	25	4	0
London to Peking	„	Calais	1st	1037·95	41	2	9
		„	2nd	723·60	28	13	7
		Ostend	1st	1027	40	14	2
		„	2nd	716·85	28	8	2

What is to be seen in the course of a journey through this far-off land, from which tales of terror used to come as from some lonely land of inexorable exile, where misery, pain, and death alone awaited its unhappy visitors? Thanks to the Russian railway and the accounts of many modern travellers, such fantastic pictures, depicting Siberia as the country of despair, no longer obtain credence even among the least informed. Convicts and prisons, with an undue share perhaps of human misery and suffering, no doubt exist, but these are far away in the inhospitable regions of Yakutsk, and form but a small part of the Siberia of to-day; nor do the horrors of the Arctic prison come under the purview of the traveller on the railway. The prospect which meets the traveller's gaze is of a very different kind.

Of Western Siberia I cannot speak from personal experience. The picture which lingers in my mind from the accounts of other travellers is a simple monochrome. Uninterrupted plain from dawn till noon, and from noon till dusk, and from dusk till dawn again, hundreds and hundreds of miles of it. In September a sea of waving golden corn spread out all round, and tree-life in the shape of alder, birch, and willow. My own acquaintance with the line began at the settlement of Novo Nicholaewsk on the right bank of the Ob river, and it is at Novo Nicholaewsk, therefore, that I must ask the reader to step on board the train with me.

First, however, a word about the settlement itself. In countries like Siberia towns spring up as if by magic; where there was nothing one day there may be as likely as not a town the next, and Novo Nicholaewsk is an apt illustration of this phenomenon. Nine years ago a vast virgin forest covered the banks of the great Ob river, through which the railway forced its way. Now a settlement of 30,000 inhabitants, which is awaiting only an imperial edict, constituting it a town, to become a great deal larger, flourishes on the site of fallen pine and birch, and bids fair ere long to force its way to the forefront of Siberian cities. The advantageous position which it occupies at the junction of the railway and the great Ob waterway, and the fact that it is situated in the heart of the richest of the Siberian governments, are sufficient guarantees of the future which lies before it. A large government biscuit factory for the supply of troops, which is in process of construction, points to the probability of its shortly becoming an important military depot; and the fact that in one or two instances large buildings of brick are at this moment being raised to replace existing structures of wood, is

sufficient evidence of the belief of those concerned that a release from the ties attaching to imperial Cabinet property is at hand, and that it is on the verge of becoming a town. It may interest the British consumer to learn that at the present time this little settlement is exporting something like 54,000,000 lb. of butter a-year, part of which finds its way direct to London, while a considerable portion of the remainder passes through Denmark, where it is remade, finally reaching the London market as "best Danish butter."[1]

Between this point and Lake Baikal, a distance of 1173½ miles, lies the middle link of the Siberian railway. Seated in an easy-chair in the comfortable saloon of the "International," which runs once a-week from Moscow to Irkutsk, you gaze out on an almost uninterrupted expanse of pine, fir, and birch, in the midst of which the occasional small clearings where settlers have built themselves houses and tilled the land are dwarfed into insignificance. The vast gloomy depths of a limitless virgin forest confront you on every side, and the three days' struggle which you enter upon to free yourself from the monotony of unending forest is a futile one, for from first to last fir, pine, and birch are gloriously triumphant, forcing upon you a sense of your own insignificance and of their unquestioned dominion.

As day fades into night after leaving the Ob, the gloomy jungle opens for a space, and you glide slowly into Taigar. A few years ago Taigar was what its name still suggests — virgin forest.

[1] The dairy-farming industry, with special reference to the manufacture of butter for export, has in a few years made rapid strides in Western Siberia, which now exports annually to Baltic ports for shipment abroad butter to the value of over £3,500,000.

Now it is the junction for Tomsk, which lies on a branch line 59 miles to the north, and wears an air of importance in consequence. The line expands mysteriously into a dozen sidings, red wooden buildings with green roofs spring up all round, numerous engines with quaint bulbous-shaped spark-arresters surmounting their funnels—for wood still forms the greater part of the fuel on the Siberian railway—puff officiously up and down, while a large brick engine-house shelters a dozen more. Long rows of red waggons occupy many of the sidings, with here and there a water-tank among them. And thereby hangs a tale, for Taigar, to say the least of it, was inconsiderately chosen, there being practically no water, and the supply having consequently to be brought by rail. Indeed the whole line seems to have been built with an astonishing lack of foresight. The water-supply in many cases appears to have been considered only after the rails were laid, the rails themselves were far too light for what was required of them, and were speedily replaced by heavier ones, which in their turn are proving all too light for the amount of traffic which has rapidly sprung up. No provision was made when the embankments were thrown up for the future doubling of the line; the cuttings are so narrow and so steep that you expect every shower to bring a ton of earth rolling down on to the line, and all the bridges have been built to admit only of a single rail. No doubt the traffic, which sprang up as if by magic, far exceeded all calculations, and while work is being pushed forward to enable the existing line to cope with the demands made upon it, such as the replacing of the wooden

bridges across small streams by superior erections of stone and the addition of sidings at all the larger stations, the necessity of doubling the line is under consideration. In this connection it may be mentioned that, in view of the difficulties which stand in the way of doubling the existing line, serious consideration is likely to be given to a scheme which has been suggested, for building an entirely separate line at a considerable distance to the north. In such a scheme would lie the salvation of Tomsk.

Beyond Taigar the line passes by several towns of importance—Mariinsk, Achinsk, Krasnoyarsk, and Kansk—while gradually passing from the level plains of Western Siberia into the more mountainous lands of the districts of Yeniseisk and Irkutsk. Here the configuration of the country has been followed with ridiculous faithfulness, the result being a succession of curves, over which our pace, attaining at the best a modest average of twenty miles an hour, becomes a crawl. To the uninitiated, indeed, the serpentine alignment appears wholly unnecessary, recalling vivid impressions of the twists and turns of another railway nearer home, which is said to have lined the pockets of a certain baron of Hebraic descent, while at the same time rendering him an object of anathema on the shores of the Golden Horn.

Long before Irkutsk is reached the monotony of the journey is brought home to one, for there is little to divert one's attention on the way. Once we passed another "International" on its way back from Irkutsk, and greetings were exchanged before we moved on, and sometimes we overtook trains carrying convicts, easily recognisable by their closely

barred windows. At every wayside station we jumped out in company with our fellow-passengers—Germans, Russians, Frenchmen, Swedes, and Danes—to stretch our legs during the liberal waits, and on one occasion two of our companions indulged in a little mild revolver practice in the forest close by, by way of passing the time! At last, however, on the morning of the fourth day after leaving Ob, we ran into a large suburb with busy station harbouring a number of trains, crept cautiously across the Angara by a wooden bridge plastered with notices forbidding smoking, and liberally supplied with barrels of water, to draw up finally alongside of the stone buildings of the station of Irkutsk beyond.

The train goes on for another forty odd miles to Baikal; but Irkutsk is worthy of some remark, and before continuing my journey across the great lake and through Manchuria, I must conclude this chapter by devoting a few words to it.

Irkutsk, like most towns in a new country, began life in a humble way. One Ivan Pakhoboff reached the river Irkut in 1652 while engaged in collecting tribute from the Buriats in the shape of furs, and established an intrenched post on its banks, wherefore it is called Irkutsk to this day. It was not destined, however, to remain on its original site, for it was afterwards transferred to the banks of the Angara, and in 1686 became a town. Now it is the second city in all Siberia, and far the most imposing in appearance, the seat of a governor-general of 2,807,626 square miles of territory, the proud possessor of upwards of sixty houses of worship, of the very creditable number of forty-five educational institutions, of an admirable museum, of a theatre that cost close upon £30,000, and of a gold-smelting laboratory which

has smelted since it came into being in 1870 the very respectable amount of 643½ tons of gold, having a probable value of upwards of £80,000,000 sterling. And now, to show how its citizens have thriven, it is about to erect a statue to the late Emperor at a cost of 300,000 roubles or £31,915.

Many of the buildings are fine structures, the main streets and market-square provide splendid shops, and the cathedral, standing somewhat apart in an open space, is magnificent, and it is only when you reach the slums and descend abruptly from well-kept streets and stately mansions to cesspools, dust-heaps, and squalid shanties that you remember that you are in an Asian town. One night I witnessed a performance at the theatre, and the acting struck me as very good—and indeed I should be a good judge, for I understood no word of what was said! The museum of the East Siberian Branch of the Russian Geographical Society is a fine building, and contains much that is worth seeing. I saw specimens of marble, lapis-lazuli, coal, graphite, and other minerals from the district; mammoth bones and tusks; the skeleton of a prehistoric man; shells, insects, snakes, fish, and, what is especially striking, the very fine collection of Buddhist specialities. The library is well stocked with periodicals from English, American, German, and French societies, and contains books in many languages besides Russian.

Perhaps the object of chief interest to the traveller is the gold-smelting laboratory. Originally the yearly average weight of gold which passed through the laboratory at Irkutsk amounted to 54,000 lb. In recent years, however, laboratories have been established at Nicholaewsk and Blagovestchensk of blood-stained fame, and yet a third is being created at

THE CATHEDRAL, IRKUTSK.

Bodaibo, so that in future a fifth of that amount is all that is looked forward to.[1] The mines from which Irkutsk at present draws its chief supply are those of the Lena Company, with an average annual output of 9000 lb., and of the Imperial Cabinet in Transbaikalia, with a yield of 5040 lb. The gold law, until quite recently, was stringent, all gold-dust having under pain of penalty to be sold to the Government. Now, however, this law has been repealed, and the free sale of gold is everywhere legal.

The process of smelting is an interesting one. I was conducted into a large room having all the appearance of a chemical laboratory. Presently a number of sealed leather bags were brought in containing the raw material, and after these had been carefully weighed and opened, the gold was mixed with borax, poured into graphite crucibles, and placed in the furnace for half an hour. The molten metal was then poured into moulds, and the resultant ingots stored in the strong-room prior to their being despatched to St Petersburg. At the time of my visit I saw ingots with a total weight of 5400 lb. thus stored. The gold is valued at from 18,000 to 21,000 roubles a *pud*, or, roughly, at from £53 to £62 a pound, and after it is weighed and analysed a certificate is issued to the owners, which can be cashed at any state bank. The gold from the Amur is the purest, containing, after smelting, 96 per cent of pure gold, that from the Lena mines showing from $91\frac{2}{5}$ to $93\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of pure metal.

It would be easy to write at length of the many buildings and objects of interest of Irkutsk; I spent a most instructive morning at the fine technical school,

[1] For the output of Western Siberia there have long been laboratories at Barnaul—the oldest in Siberia—and Tomsk, and recently also one at Krasnoyarsk.

and an interesting afternoon at a celebrated monastery a little distance from the town, to mention but two of the many institutions of which it can boast. But were I to do so this volume, already sufficiently swollen, would become expanded to an altogether unwarrantable size, and I have perhaps said enough to show that the large cities of Siberia have been built and fostered with a due sense of the responsible position which it will undoubtedly be their lot to occupy some day.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EAST CHINESE RAILWAY.

Russia's *coup*—The line to pass through Manchuria—Great Britain's reply—The Manchurian railway agreement—A journey over the Manchurian railway in the autumn of 1903—Across Lake Baikal—The frontier of Manchuria—Calibre of the line—Kharbin—Military occupation—Article II. of the Manchurian Convention of 1902—The ambitions of Kharbin—Magnificent crops—Dalni—Port Arthur—Russia's outlay in Manchuria—Niuchwang—The Boxer outbreak Russia's opportunity—The situation at Niuchwang at the outbreak of hostilities—Mukden and Antung opened to foreign trade—Peking the end of the journey.

ONCE upon a time it was supposed that the Trans-Siberian railway was to be built entirely through Russian territory. East of Lake Baikal it was to run in a more or less straight line to Kharbarofsk, whence a line has been built to Vladivostok; and in the meanwhile, before the line was completed, the waterway of the Amur was to be used as the connecting-link in the communications between Russia and the Pacific. Russian statesmen, no doubt, knew better, though they kept their knowledge to themselves; and even people who were not Russian statesmen, but who had made themselves acquainted with Russian aims and Russian methods, spoke sceptically of the section through the mountainous regions of the

Amur,[1] and of the ice-bound terminus of Vladivostok, and watched events in interested anticipation. Nor were they disappointed at the sequel. For before very long Russia sprung upon the world one of those masterpieces of diplomacy which she alone is capable of perpetrating. The line did not pass through the Amur region at all, but ran along through a much easier country belonging to Russia's neighbour, and in addition to linking up Vladivostok with Moscow, forged its way to the south through another man's land till it reached Port Arthur, a terminus in far warmer water than Vladivostok, and possessing a situation conveniently adjacent to the capital of the Celestial Empire and seat of political activity in the Far East.

British diplomacy, it is true, for once rose to the occasion, and secured for Great Britain the lease of Wei-hai-Wei, a harbour which, as a matter of fact, completely commands Port Arthur; but the advantage thus obtained was hastily and gratuitously thrown away when it was made known that it had been decided not to fortify it, and the sole advantage which we now reap from our position is that in occupying it ourselves we prevent any one else more aggressively

[1] I am not personally acquainted with the region through which such a line would have had to pass, but it is admitted on all sides that the Amur section could of itself have had no value, and would consequently be looked upon merely as a necessity for completing the communication between Stretensk and Khabarofsk. The position is put plainly by Vladimir in his 'Russia on the Pacific,' when he says: "Here we have about 2000 versts to be constructed through dense forests, across big rivers, often away from all population, under rigorous climatic conditions, with a frozen soil requiring to be laboriously broken up. Moreover, the local conditions do not warrant the heavy expenses necessary for the work; the population of the Amur province amounts only to 115,000 inhabitants, and the country is mostly uncultivated; many years must pass before the trade of the people, all living on the banks of the river, and already provided with regular steamer service, will require a railway."

inclined from doing so. There is every sign that the decision was come to in haste and in contradiction to a former determination, since five admirably and scientifically constructed forts were built on the island at the mouth of the harbour at a cost of £25,000; but the rescission of the order to fortify the place having gone forth before the guns which had already been shipped were able to reach their destination, they stand to-day — powerless either for offence or defence — as glaring illustrations of official fatuity and vacillation.

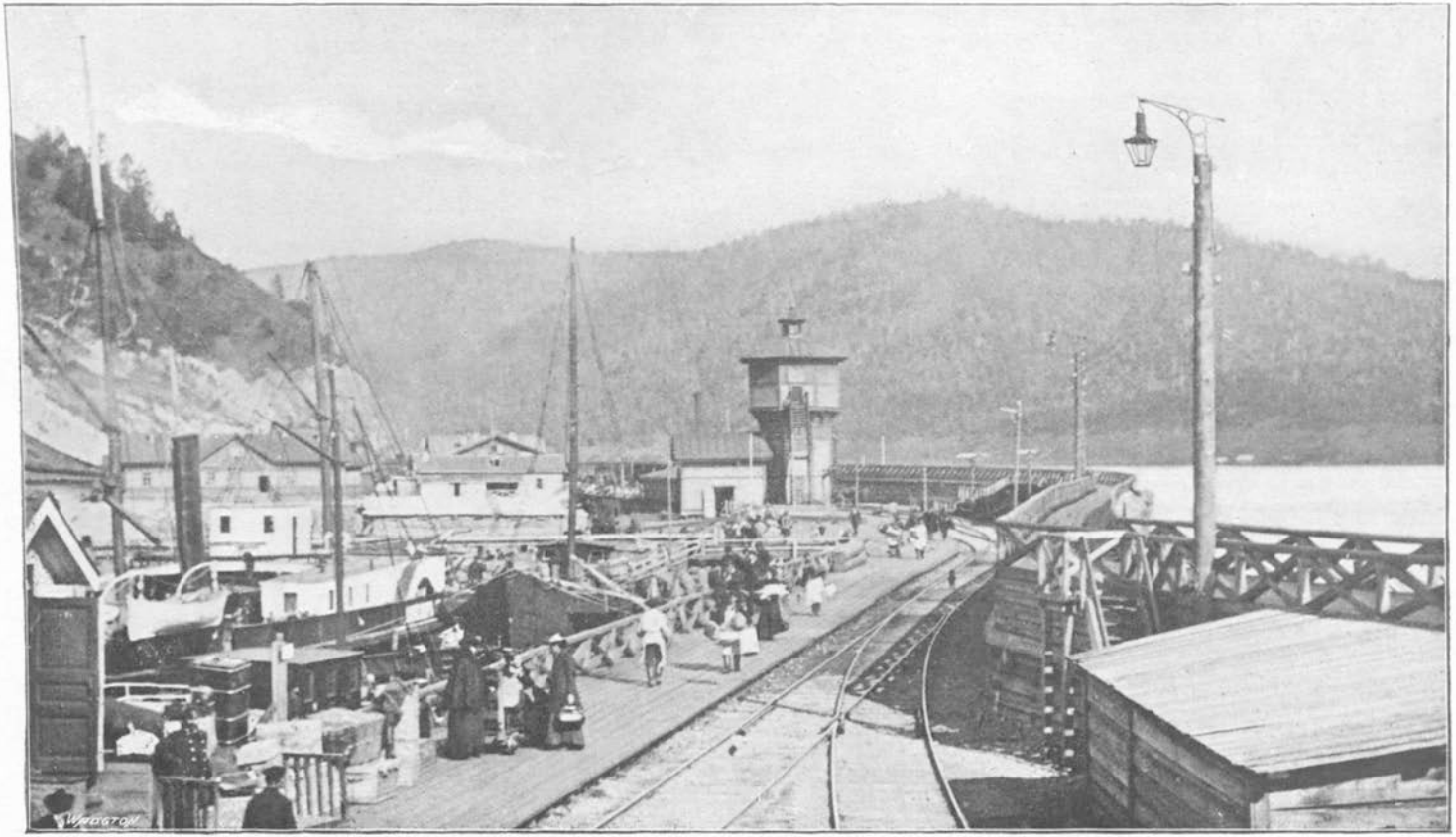
The main incidents of the diplomatic *coup* which led up to the construction of the Manchurian railway are now a matter of history. The Liaotung peninsula ceded to Japan, "in perpetuity and full sovereignty, with all fortifications, arsenals, and public property thereon," by a vanquished China; the remonstrance of an indignant Russia—indignant that the peace of the Far East should be threatened by the occupation of Chinese territory by an alien Power! The seizure by the expostulating Power two years later of the very country in question, and the prompt production of an agreement, signed *more than two years before*, sanctioning the construction by her of railways across Manchuria, are the main points in an interesting little story which throws an illuminating light upon Muscovite methods, while it at the same time accords triumphant testimony to the success of Muscovite diplomacy.

The agreement in question, drawn up between the Russo-Chinese Bank and the Chinese Government, provides for the forming of a company described as the "East Chinese Railway Company," to construct a line across Manchuria from west to east, connected with the Trans-Baikal line on the one hand and the South Ussuri line on the other, with a branch

known as the South Manchurian line running from Kharbin on the main line to Dalni and Port Arthur. Shares in the company can only be held by Russian and Chinese subjects, a rebate of ⅓ of the Chinese custom duties is allowed on goods imported and exported across the northern frontier by rail, the company have rights over a strip of territory on either side of the line, and are entitled to keep as many troops along it as are considered necessary for its protection. The resultant railway is now a link in the great overland route to the Far East.

With this very brief reminder of the birth and growth of the Manchurian railway, and without for the present entering upon any wider discussion of the Manchurian question, let me give a description of a journey over it in the autumn of 1903.

At 10 A.M. on September 24 we steamed out of Irkutsk, and by midday had covered the forty-two miles which lay between us and the station of Baikal, built on the shores of the lake of the same name. Here we had to leave our carriage and embark on the steamer *Angara*, for the circum-Baikal branch was only in process of construction, and though its completion was officially predicted for January 1904, the officials responsible for the prediction were the only people who believed even ostensibly in its possible fulfilment. The large ice-breaker *Baikal*, which accommodates whole trains on board, and is capable of cutting its way through 2 feet of solid ice, is used only for goods trains, passengers being taken across on the smaller boat, which is said to be capable of travelling through from 16 to 18 inches of ice. Both vessels were constructed at the Armstrong works, and brought out in pieces and fitted up on the lake, as was also a floating dock, which has, however, so far proved a failure. The smaller boat on



STATION ON LAKE BAIKAL.

which we crossed is fitted with triple-expansion engines of 176 effective horse-power; but as a result of the feverish haste with which Russia hurried on her arrangements for transporting troops to Manchuria in 1900, the boilers were not properly lined, and are now in a precarious condition, one of them being actually out of work. The speed attained averages about 10 knots, and at 7.45 P.M., four hours after starting, we reached Missovaiya, the present starting-point of the Trans-Baikal line.

Here we found a train awaiting us, and for the next twenty-eight hours were borne through the wooded slopes of Trans-Baikalia to Chita. Beyond Chita the line continues to Stretensk on the upper reaches of the Amur; but at the junction of Karimskaia we turned south across a hungry-looking steppe beyond the forest zone to the little station which stands on the frontier of the most northern dependency of China, and bears the name of the country to which it gives access—Manchuria. It was dark when we drew up alongside of the platform of the frontier station, but there was a suggestive air of activity about our surroundings. A dozen instruments clicked noisily from the brightly lit telegraph-office, large red lights moving to and fro in the darkness outside suggested the active movement of rolling-stock, while the sound of a measured tread up and down where trains stood in the sidings, spoke unmistakably of the presence of troops. Troops there were, trains full of them, forty men crowded into each of the big, red, covered-in goods waggons of which they were composed. Eastward bound? No doubt, but a zealous sentry peremptorily ordered off a too inquisitive passenger, and their destination remained a mystery.

When daylight broke we were travelling through a mountainous country, and later on climbed to the summit

of the Khingan range and descended again on the far side by a laborious zigzag, taking an hour and fifty-five minutes to cover a distance of ten miles. No one but a Russian engineer could ever have evolved so cumbrous and intricate a method of surmounting a mountain-range, and even he has at last done what any one else would have done at the outset—made a tunnel through it. Mountains are the bugbear of the Russian. He has none to speak of in his own country, and he does not understand them when he comes across them elsewhere. It is perhaps fortunate for him, therefore, that he has not had to make a single tunnel between Moscow and Irkutsk.

On the first opportunity I alighted to inspect the line and compare it with the Siberian track. The rails were certainly heavier,—perhaps 27 lb. to the foot, as compared with 18 on the Siberian sections, though still merely spiked down to the sleepers, and a powerful compound engine stood at the end of the five business-like armoured carriages—for east of the Baikal the cars are protected with ¼-inch steel plate, capable of turning a bullet—in place of the light freight-engines used on the Siberian sections.

Night found us still speeding through a mountainous country; but when I awoke in the morning it was to gaze upon an absolute level, which gradually resolved itself from a grass-covered steppe into a sea of cultivation. At midday on the 28th we reached Kharbin, a rapidly growing town, with large government-built—Russian Government of course—brick buildings springing up in all directions. Military occupation stares you in the face here, and a large camp stands just to the south of the town; but this is an exception. For the most part troops are not paraded along the line for the satisfaction of travellers, and one might travel along

THE GREAT SIBERIAN RAILWAY.

it without suspecting the presence of any excessive number. Nevertheless they are there. There are military posts at intervals of 5 versts the length of the line, barracks and stables are in process of construction at every station along the South Manchurian branch, and long lines of innocent-looking goods waggons on the sidings prove on closer inspection to be the temporary home of Russian soldiers. I was told on excellent authority that by July—three months, that is, before the promised final evacuation of the country—there were 200,000 Russian troops in the Far East.[1] In August an additional twenty-three trains, bearing troops and military equipment, passed along the Siberian line eastward bound, and now a fortnight prior to the date fixed for the completion of the evacuation of Manchuria two more brigades were hurrying south from Chita, and an order had gone forth to replace all Chinese employees on the line, such as firemen, pointsmen, &c., by Russian soldiers.

Mobilisation everywhere; the air was full of it. I read through Article ii. of the Manchurian Convention of April 1902: "Russia . . . consents on its part . . . to withdraw gradually all Russian troops from Manchuria, as follows: (*a*) Within six months from the signing of the Convention, from the south-western portion of Mukden province as far as the Liao river, at the same time restoring the railway to China; (*b*) during the six months following—*i.e.*, between October 8, 1902, and April 8, 1903—from the remaining portion of Mukden province and Kirin province; (*c*) during the six months following—*i.e.*, between April 8, 1903, and

[1] This estimate has since been confirmed by Mr J. W. Davidson, U.S. consul at Formosa, who said in December, "Every place of importance on and off the railroad is held by troops, whose number, inclusive of the garrison of Vladivostok, is not less than 200,000."

October 8, 1903—Russia will withdraw her troops from the remaining province of Heh-lung-kiang." And then I looked at the military activity all round me, at the vast military encampment which stretched away to the south, at those rows of significant red waggons, on each of which was written, so that he who runs might read, the fateful words, "forty men or eight horses," and at their perspiring, expectant, tightly packed occupants. And I thought of the hecatombs of Russian assurances in the past, and wished that those good people who are so anxious to invite our Indian neighbours to occupy commanding positions on our flank in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere were with me to see it all too. Actual experience is so much more realistic than paper theories concocted in an editor's office. Of course, there have been assurances about Manchuria—stacks of them. The assurance of Count Lamsdorff, given through the Russian Ambassador on August 12, 1903, that "the evacuation of Manchuria was to take place at an early date, although that date could not exactly be fixed," was a particularly interesting one under the circumstances!

The town of Kharbin is naturally destined to become an important centre, if only from its situation on the Sungari river, as the junction of the South Manchurian line with the main trans-continental railway; but there is also every sign of administrative zeal to push the place artificially into prominence. The administrative portion of the town is being rapidly covered with well-paved streets, and handsome buildings, including a fine railway-station and a big hotel,—which will, at any rate in the first instance, be run by the railway company, or under the auspices of the Russo-Chinese Bank,—are being feverishly carried to completion. An administrative building costing £110,000 and engine-shops costing £251,000 are in course of erection, and a hospital is

being built at an outlay of £42,000. No one but Russians or Chinese are permitted to own land, construct buildings, or engage in any permanent enterprise, and the land for many miles round has been secured, so as to make it impossible for any foreign influence to obtain a foothold close to the city. The Russo-Chinese Bank and the commercial department of the Russo-Chinese railway are the commercial powers in Manchuria. They buy and sell produce, and leave little room apparently for the individual or private trader to compete with any profit. Amongst the industries, Mr Miller, U.S. consul at Niuchwang, mentions flour-mills, brick manufacturing, breweries, meat-packing establishments, bean-oil, confectionery, and saw-mills. At the time of my visit two large steam flour-mills were in operation, and three more were being laid down. It is possible that these may pay, but they were all built or building on credit, and on conditions of full mortgage to the firms supplying the machinery; and it must be borne in mind that millet is the staple food of the native population, and they do not want it milled for them.[1] The commercial and residential quarters are meanwhile left to individual enterprise, and, as my travelling companion remarked, "following usual Russian precedent, no doubt a very long time will elapse before that part of Kharbin emerges from the chrysalis state of wooden or sun-dried brick shanties, impassable roads, and interior and exterior filth." On the whole, "artificial" and "subsidised" are the words which suggest themselves in connection with Kharbin, and when Mr Miller wrote that "it is in this city more

[1] Mr Davidson, however, already quoted, says: "The production of wheat in Manchuria is increasing to a phenomenal degree, and its manufacture into flour is very profitable. The city of Kharbin alone will from the beginning of 1904 produce 800,000 lb. of flour daily."

than in all the others combined that *Russia* is asserting her intentions of becoming an active industrial force in the affairs of the Orient," he would have given a more strictly accurate idea of the existing conditions if he had substituted for "Russia" the words "Russian Government."

South of Kharbin spread masses and masses of millet, extending mile after mile as far as the eye can see. Little else, in fact, is visible,—occasional clumps of trees looking like little green dots in a bronze-brown sea, and the villages themselves being half-buried in the surrounding crops. For two days and nights we steam through crops such as are in all probability to be seen nowhere else in the world, passing Mukden, the capital of the country; Ta-Shih-Chiao, the junction for Niuchwang and Peking, where only so lately as August the line had been washed away by floods, and all traffic suspended for nine days in consequence; to pull up at length on the shores of the Pacific at Dalni, striving so desperately to become a thriving commercial port, or at the great military and naval base of Port Arthur.

Dalni, as the Russians have christened the town which they have built on the bay of Taliewan, has all the appearance of a modern town, and does credit to its creators and owners, the Russian Ministry of Finance. A few years ago there was nothing. The order went forth that there must be a town, and a town accordingly was put in hand. Houses were built, brick houses such as you would expect to see in any modern watering-place, except for their roofs, which show a tendency towards the curves which distinguish Chinese architecture; streets were laid out and paved, harbour works were begun, offices, shops, and a magnificent electric station, fitted by a Buda-

MANCHURIAN AGRICULTURISTS.

Pesth firm, to give light to the future citizens and drive the motors at the dock workshops, were erected, and, lo and behold, the order was fulfilled! It next became necessary that people should be induced to occupy the new town, and Dalni was made a free port. Port charges were likewise introduced at Port Arthur on all trading vessels that entered that harbour; but in spite of everything Dalni has up to the present failed to vindicate its right to the title of a successful commercial town. The greater part of the town in fact is at present composed of the administrative quarter built and reserved for tenancy by the government and municipal officials and employees, the ground marked out for residential and commercial quarters remaining for the most part unclaimed and unbuilt, the reason being the absence of any real development of commercial activity with the interior, such trade as there is being bound up with government contracts or based upon the market afforded by the naval, military, or railway elements.

Port Arthur is, of course, essentially a naval base, and on my arrival I found everything given up to naval and military preparation. Gangs of coolies could be seen at work on fortifications on the hills which surround the town, and all building and commercial activity had been turned into government channels, the building and fitting of government stores occupying the attention of the authorities. The harbour is not a very large one, and is in places extremely shallow, though this defect has now been remedied to a certain extent by extensive dredging, and I saw one large dry dock which looked capable of accommodating large vessels. In another direction I observed the work-sheds which had been built for piecing together destroyers; but on the whole the traveller will not dis-

cover a great deal that is of interest,—he, of course, cannot visit the things which are of real interest, such as fortifications, &c.,—and finding the miserable shanties which served for hotels a trial to both mind and body, I soon shook the dust of its streets from my feet, and steamed across the water to the treaty port of Chifu, on the opposite shore of the gulf.

There is one thing, I think, which cannot fail to strike the traveller in Manchuria, and that is the disproportionately small return which has so far accrued to Russia for her vast expenditure in that country. The engineer in charge of the construction of Russian railways in Manchuria informed Mr Miller, the United States consul at Niuchwang, that £27,000,000 had been expended in railway construction alone; and when we add to this the cost of fortifications and construction in Port Arthur, Dalni, Kharbin, &c.,—it is said that bribes to the extent of 2,000,000 taels (roughly, £288,600) were administered in obtaining the lease of Port Arthur,—and the expenditure involved in keeping large numbers of troops in the country, the disbursement so far must have amounted to anything from 50 to 100 millions. And what has she received in return? An increased power of dictation in the affairs of China perhaps, but in addition a naval base which, though superior in some respects to a more northern port, is admittedly far from ideal—a commercial port which has been aptly described as still-born; and, to crown all, a war which, whatever be its final issue, can never surely be anything but disastrous to a country in the present stage of financial and economic development of Russia. It is, in fact, the unexpectedly resolute action of Japan, following upon the Anglo-Japanese alliance, which has seriously upset the calculations of Russian statesmen, and which must have a strong modifying effect upon the whole trend of

events in the Far East. It is as yet impossible to say what may take place at the termination of a war the result of which no one can foresee; but it is well to observe, when considering the present lack of tangible return for expenditure involved, the measures which Russia had taken to secure her position in the future —a position which, but for the unwelcome rupture in diplomatic relations, she would most undoubtedly have achieved.

In the first place, then, those who ridiculed the policy of sinking vast capital sums in territory which was only leased, even if the lease did extend for ninety-nine years, paid but a poor compliment to the astuteness of Russian diplomatists. Those responsible knew perfectly well what they were doing, for they knew that they had a master clause in the treaty leasing them the land for the railway, which constituted them in reality the owners of the soil. And that clause, according to the French explorer M. Chaffaujon, reads as follows: "If at the expiration of ninety-nine years China desires to enter into possession of the line, she must refund to the Company all the expenses of construction and maintenance of the line from the first." The account, we may safely presume, will be one which the Chancellor of the Chinese Exchequer in 1995 will hardly find it convenient to settle. So when Russia spends money on her Manchurian railway it is as a landowner and not as a tenant, and if she spends lavishly on her property she has excellent reasons for doing so.

Secure in her railway property, the next thing was to secure the trade. I have referred to the strenuous efforts of the Russian authorities to attract the commerce of Manchuria to Dalni, and I have also pointed out how they have failed. There was a very excellent reason why they should fail, and that reason was

Niuchwang. Opened to commerce in accordance with the terms of the treaty of Tientsin in 1861, Niuchwang has become the fourth in importance of all the treaty ports of China, and is to-day the commercial door to Manchuria. But the trade of Niuchwang was in the hands of British, American, and Japanese firms, and it became necessary to Russian aspirations that this should be altered. And so when in 1898 the Russian railway appeared upon the scene a large property a little distance from the foreign settlement was acquired through Ministerial pressure at Peking, and a branch line was built which was no doubt to have been severed as soon as Dalni had become the port of entry into Manchuria—Niuchwang thus being cut off beyond the hope of competition.[1] No success, however, attended these schemes to substitute Dalni for Niuchwang as the commercial gateway of Manchuria, and Russia was casting about in her mind for other methods when the Boxer outbreak of 1900 played most opportunely into her hands.

It is not my intention here to go into the history of the Boxer rising of 1900: all I wish to do is to recall its effect upon Russian plans. The course of events in Pechili, and, to use the language of 'The Official Messenger,' published in St Petersburg on March 24 (April 6), 1901, "a series of acts of aggression committed by Chinese insurgents on the frontier of Russia, rendered necessary the occupation of the port of Niuchwang and the entry of Russian

[1] The plague bogey, which the Russians have found so useful an instrument of obstruction against Indian trade in other parts of Asia, would probably have been the weapon called in here. After the Russian occupation of Niuchwang, the administrator, Mr Gross, told Consul Fulford that "Russia must protect her railway, and might cut off the branch line to Niuchwang in the event of epidemics unless proper control were allowed."—Parliamentary Paper, China No. 2, 1904.

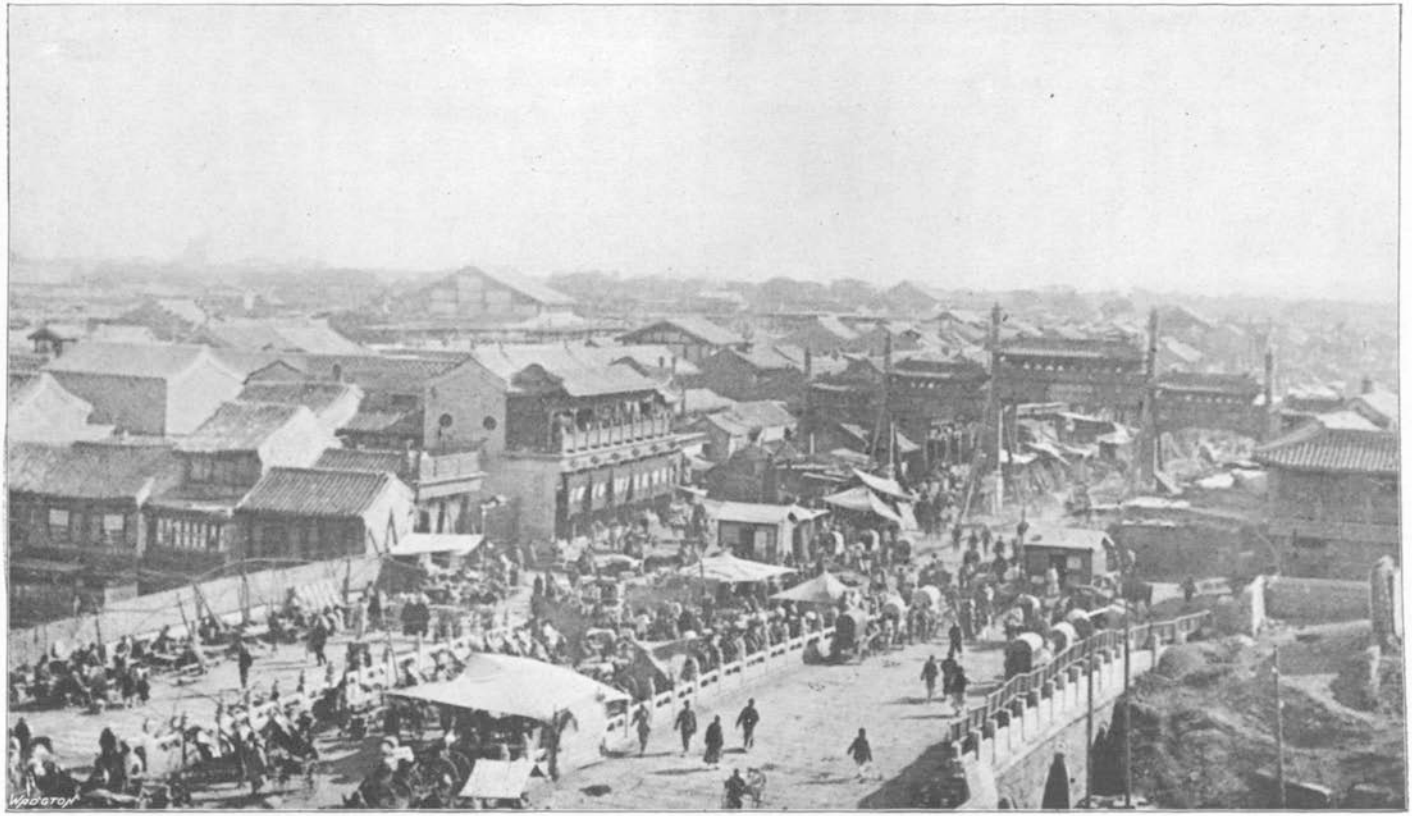
troops into Manchuria"; and though repeated pledges were given that such occupation was only a temporary measure, and a Convention was signed in April 1902 regulating the gradual evacuation of the country, the temptation to retain the port which was of such vital importance to their schemes was found when the time came to be too strong for Russian statesmen, and, in spite of diplomatic pressure brought to bear by Great Britain and other Powers interested in the matter, the curtain which rose on the drama of 1904 displayed to the world the too familiar scene of Russia in triumphant possession of the stage—superbly contemptuous of the injured protestations of her vanquished rivals at the sheaves of dishonoured promises and engagements, at the expense of which she had secured her position. She had yet to learn that a little Power had risen in the East, which, by standing firm to its word and refusing to throw down its hand before Russian bluff, proved itself a match for Russian duplicity. And the lesson has not yet been completed.

The situation at Niuchwang at the time of the commencement of hostilities has been accurately summed up by Mr H. Fulford Bush, in a paper read before the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, as follows: "A Russian administrator, backed by Russian troops, in place of the Chinese authorities; the custom-house, with the Russian administrator at its local head; the revenue paid into the Russo-Chinese Bank, pending Russia's settlement with China; the sanitary control Russian, in all matters affecting the Chinese; Russian prestige and power paramount; the province a prey to the brigands and riffraff generally; the usual trade channels impeded and obstructed by the confusion and disruption prevailing throughout the province; and a

gradual diminution in the export of light sundries, the trade in which the Russian authorities were doing their utmost to divert towards Russia."

In other words, the bear's claws had closed over the victim, which was to be strangled or absorbed as the future might dictate. The calculations upon which such action was based have, as I have already pointed out, been rudely and, from the Russian point of view, unexpectedly shaken by the resolute action of Japan, and further by the courage of China, which has grown from that action, and which decided her, in face of violent opposition from Russia, to open the towns of Mukden and Antung to foreign trade. In what exact proportions the balance of power in the Far East will be readjusted at the expiration of the present war it is impossible to say; but of this much we may rest assured—that, in the event of the success or partial success of our ally, British trade and intercourse will be delivered from the shadow of that cloud which was rapidly spreading from the north, and which the diplomatic efforts of our own statesmen showed themselves powerless to dispel.

From Port Arthur and Chifu I travelled on to Tientsin and Peking, and later spent some time at Wei-hai-Wei before leaving for Japan; but in the Celestial capital, which has been described too often and too well to require any further comment from my pen, the immediate objective of my journey across Asia was achieved: and for the purposes of this book I take my leave of the reader, as far as the narrative of travel is concerned, within the massive walls of the Chinese capital, which, thanks to improved communications in recent years, has opened its gates to the curiosity of the world, and has therefore at last ceased to be answerable to the charge of "not making itself



PEKING.

intelligible or interesting to mankind other than as an archaic curiosity."[1] If he be imbued with a pleasing imagination, it will be beneath the shadow of the pagoda, or in view of the gaudeous outlines of the Temple of Heaven, or listening perhaps to the rolling sound of the Buddhist litanies, chanted in unison by the yellow-robed inmates of the great Lama temple, that he will wish me farewell, rather than, as truth might compel me to admit, ploughing my way along those "receptacles of indescribable abominations, where the dust is acrid to nose and eyes, from the dessicated refuse of generations,"[2] which serve for streets in a "wilderness of garbage."[3] Let it be so. It is as the home of sunshine and romance, of temples and palaces, of dazzling colour and bewildering animation, of men and manners that set soaring the imagination, of mysterious priests and titled kings, rather than as the seat of poverty and vice, of squalor and sordid materialism—of all, in fact, that is of the earth earthy—that I prefer to look back upon the cities of the East.

[1] The Englishman in China. Alexander Michie.
[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

ENGLAND IN ASIA

"The problem of Asia is a world problem, which has come upon the world in an age when, through the rapidity of communication, it is wide-awake and sensible as never before, and by electrical touch, to every stirring in its members, and to the tendency thereof."

—Captain A. T. MAHAN, *The Problem of Asia.*

CHAPTER XXVI.

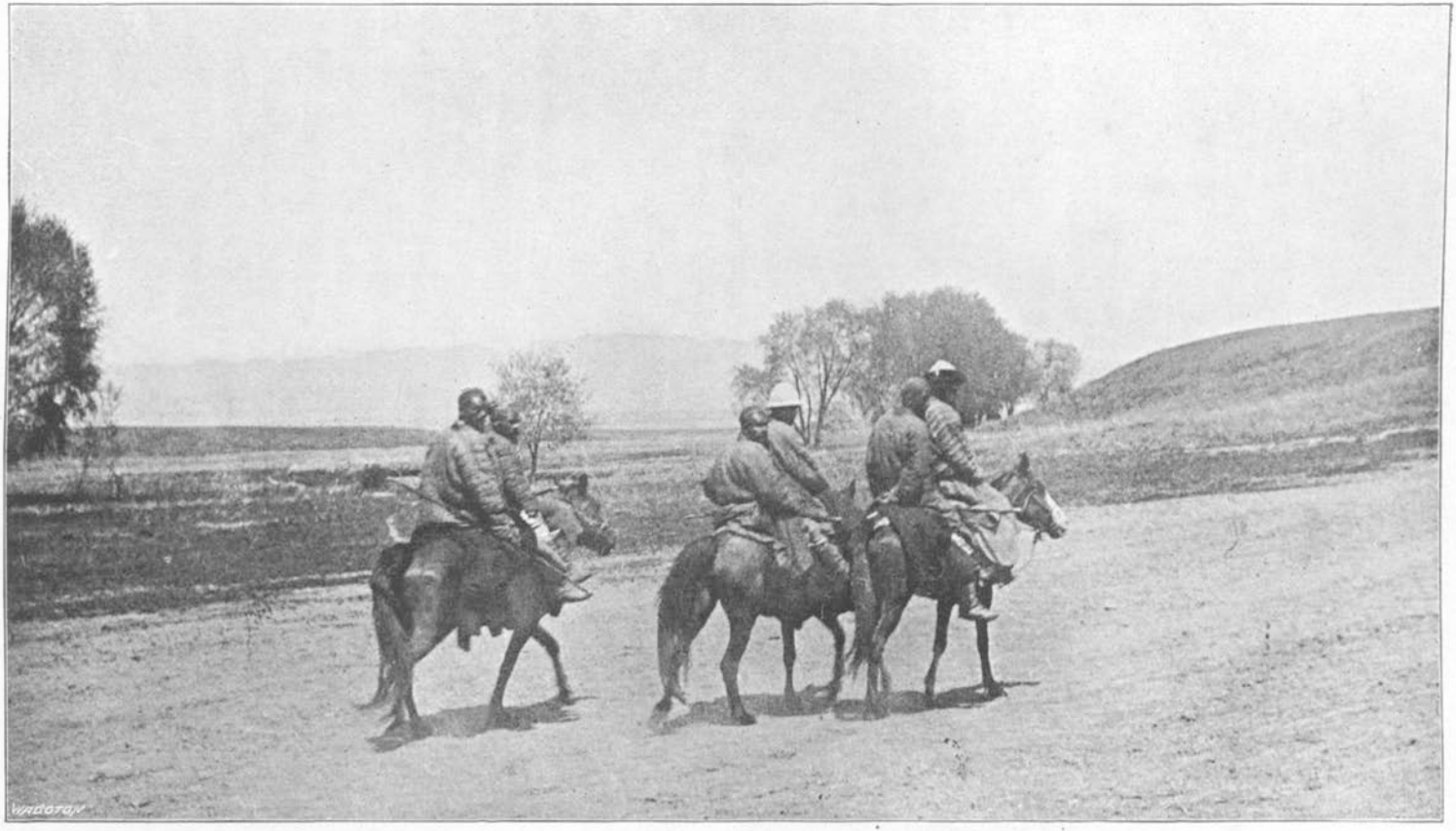
THE NEAR EAST.

England and Russia in the East—The point of view from which Asiatic questions must be regarded—"Without India the British Empire could not exist"—The value of prestige—The commercial and strategic aspects of the Near Eastern and the Far Eastern questions—Turkey—The long-standing antagonism between Russia and Turkey—Enter Germany—A novel solution of the Turkish imbroglio—The Baghdad railway—Persia—Resemblance between the Persian and Turkish problems—Indifference of Great Britain in the past—The financial blunder of 1900—The Russo-Persian railway agreement of 1890—A policy adopted—The Viceroy's visit to the Persian Gulf and the Garter Mission to Teherân—The Koweit incident—Ways and communications—Activity in the field of commerce—The Nushki-Sistan route—The British Government should become shareholders in the Imperial Bank of Persia—The recrudescence of British power.

WHEN embarking upon the task which lies before me in the concluding chapters of the present volume—in making, that is, an attempt to analyse the situation as it affects Great Britain in Asia—I find myself confronted with a dilemma at the very outset. For to give a comprehensive exposition of the problems which await solution at the hands of Great Britain in the East would require far greater space than can here be given to it, while any attempt to deal briefly with a number of questions, each one of which carries in its train a whole host of subsidiary ramifications, must necessarily provide innumerable loopholes for misunderstanding. Nevertheless, since there is no alternative,

the attempt must be made, an elementary acquaintance with Asian affairs being necessarily presupposed on behalf of the reader.

In the opening chapter of this book I have been at pains to point out that as the kingdoms of the East have slowly but surely sunk into a decline, they have naturally been absorbed by, or fallen under the ægis of, that Power which by its geographical position was brought into contact with them—Russia. It is equally clear that without geographical juxtaposition command of the sea could alone give to a Western nation dominion in the East, and it was naval supremacy in conjunction with commercial activity that gave an Eastern empire to another European Power—Great Britain. So it is "England and Russia in the East," the title that appears upon the backs of a whole host of books written upon the subject during recent years, that sums up the Eastern phase of the past century. The exclusive claims of the two nations must inevitably undergo modification in the future, since the awakening of Japan, the commercial rivalry of Western nations, notably of Germany, and the improved communications which have opened up the markets of the Eastern world of late years, have introduced additional competing forces into the arena; but nevertheless, with every allowance made for the ambitions of other Powers, the one nation that confronts England now, as in the past, whether it be across the waters of the Euxine, or over the crumpled outline of the Persian highlands, or from behind the rugged buttresses of her Indian stronghold that she directs her gaze, is and for long must continue to be Russia. Whose were the war-hardened legions that rattled at the portals of Constantinople and shook the Ottoman Empire to its foundations while England looked on aghast?—



NATIVES OF CENTRAL ASIA.

Russia's! Whose the serried ranks that a century ago were to have been hurled against the bastions of India, whose the insinuating diplomacy that is even now undermining the glacis of our Indian fort, preparing the ground for the lodgment of a hostile force, and opening out an avenue of approach whereby to render us vulnerable to a flank attack?—Russia's! Whose the grey-clad sentinel who through all the clash of conflicting interests stands threateningly on the shores of the Eastern Sea, a menace to British commercial aspirations and to the peace of the nations of the world? The answer is for ever the same—Russia's!

And so the antagonism and the irreconcilable nature of the ambitions of Great Britain and Russia form one leading factor to be borne in mind when reviewing the problem of Asia; and there is yet another, the point of view from which Asiatic questions should be regarded. For as India is the pivot of British supremacy in the East, so questions dealing with the East should be looked at largely from an Indian point of view. A half-way house between Great Britain and Australia, New Zealand and the Far East; a stronghold in the long line of communications that weld together the component parts of a widely scattered whole; the home and *raison d'être* of British power in Asia,—India occupies a unique position among the constituent parts of empire. "It is not intrinsically only," writes Captain Mahan, "that India possesses the value of a base to Great Britain; the central position which she holds relatively to China and to Egypt obtains also towards Australia and the Cape of Good Hope, assisting thus the concentration upon her of such support as either colony can extend to the general policy of an Imperial Federation." The safeguarding of India, then, must ever remain one of the cardinal articles of the belief of British states-

men, for, as was long since observed by India's present Viceroy, "without India the British Empire could not exist."

It is well, therefore, before going further, since Asian problems depend for their solution so largely upon India, to define the position of that country from an interior point of view. This has been done by Lord Curzon, than whom there is no man living better qualified to pronounce, only so lately as the spring of the present year: "India is like a fortress, with the vast moat of the sea on two of her faces, and with mountains for her walls on the remainder; but beyond those walls, which are sometimes of by no means insuperable height, and admit of being easily penetrated, extends a glacis of varying breadth and dimension. We do not want to occupy it, but we also cannot afford to see it occupied by our foes. We are quite content to let it remain in the hands of our allies and friends; but if rival and unfriendly influences creep up to it and lodge themselves right under our walls, we are compelled to intervene, because a danger would thereby grow up that might one day menace our security. This is the secret of the whole position in Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet, and as far eastwards as Siam. He would be a short-sighted commander who merely manned his ramparts in India and did not look out beyond; and the whole of our policy during the past five years has been directed towards maintaining our influence, and to preventing the expansion of hostile agencies on this area which I have described." To preserve India free from danger, therefore, and not only India, but our line of communications with India, Australia, and the Far East, it is necessary that those countries which border on India and impinge upon such communications should remain in the hands of friendly, or at any rate of innocuous,

peoples, and be kept free from the control of a strong and possibly—probably—hostile Power.

There are two more general points to be borne in mind—firstly, that in dealing with oriental races prestige is a factor the influence of which can hardly be overestimated; and secondly, that whereas there is much that is common to both the Near Eastern and Far Eastern questions, there is this great difference, that while the one is in the main a political and strategic question, the other is equally in the main a commercial one.

Instances of the effect of a falling or rising prestige can be quoted without end. In the low ebb of British influence in the councils of the Shah in the 'Eighties, Lord Curzon saw the shadow of the calamitous policy pursued by the British Government of 1880-85 in various parts of the Empire. "The retreat from South Africa, the evacuation of Kandahar, the everlasting disgrace of Khartum, the 'bolt' from the Murghab,—all these incidents rang like a trumpet-blast through the whispering-galleries of the East, and were interpreted as presages of an impending ruin."[1] A weak or magnanimous policy, which in the eyes of the Oriental are synonymous terms, is fatal, and calculated to invite disaster. In spite of the length of our experience in dealing with oriental races, we have yet fully to appreciate this fact, and to realise the difficulties which we sedulously lay up for ourselves by an obstinate refusal to observe it. The recent operations in Tibet add yet another example to the long list bequeathed to us by the past. Impressions of British impotence drawn from our almost inconceivable forbearance have sunk deep into the Tibetan mind, and are likely to be the cause of much trouble and loss of life, which, had

[1] Persia, vol. ii. p. 606.

we acted with less timidity and rather more common-sense at the outset, might well have been avoided. "We have in fact," writes Colonel Younghusband, "as I have so often remarked, not one ounce of prestige on this frontier. I have therefore nothing to work with in making a settlement."[1]

Russian intelligence was not slow to grasp this fact, with a result that Russian dealings with native races show a marked superiority—if success be any criterion—over our own. "The native," to quote one of the most recent writers on the Russian advance, "soon understands that there is no trifling, and—usually—becomes resigned. He is given to understand unmistakably what is Russian *power*."[2] Native races throughout the length of Asia from west to east who have once come into contact with Russia have perhaps disliked her, they have certainly feared her. "As the Daimios of Japan in their anti-foreign manifestoes declared that every foreigner could be insulted with impunity except the Russians, so in China the name was a talisman of security."[3] M. Popoff, the Russian secretary at Peking at the time of the Anglo-French expedition, had occasion to spend a night at a Chinese inn. Chinese soldiers swarmed in during the night, and finding a "foreign devil," at once decided to make an end of him. His salvation lay in his nationality. "That foreigner is a Russian," quoth the innkeeper; "it will be dangerous to lay a hand on him."[4] And M. Popoff was left untouched.

The last point which I mentioned with regard to the commercial and strategic element being the dominant

[1] Further Papers relating to Tibet (C.D. 2054).
[2] The Russian Advance. A. J. Beveridge.
[3] The Englishman in China. A. Michie.
[4] Ibid.

THE WALLS OF PEKING.

characteristic of the Far Eastern and Near Eastern questions respectively, is, of course, a general one. Commerce plays an important part in the Near East, and the Far East has its strategic aspect for us as well as its commercial side, more especially since we became the allies of Japan. Hongkong and Wei-hai-Wei are strategic bases, and the long access into the interior afforded by the Yangtse-Kiang is a valuable asset in the strategic capital of the Power which has command of the sea. But, broadly speaking, it may be said that the question of the Far East is, in the first instance, a commercial one, while the question of the Near East is a strategic one first and a commercial one afterwards; and when a writer in 'The Spectator' of May 9, 1903, gave expression to his opinion that "a great war to guard our petty trade in the Persian Gulf would be a financial folly," he merely showed that he had entirely failed to grasp the real issues involved.

Bearing in mind these brief generalisations, it remains for me to say a few words as to the situation in the different countries individually with which Great Britain is at the present time closely concerned.

TURKEY.

Beginning on the extreme west, we have the Turkish Empire, forming—thanks to its geographical position—the starting-point of that belt of territory of unsettled political status which stretches across Asia from west to east, and which merits the description of Captain Mahan of "the debatable and debated ground." From the days when the germ of the Russian Empire first fell upon Russian soil up to the present time an uninterrupted antagonism has existed between the two countries. The peoples have changed but the antag-

onism remains. The crescent and star of the ancient Greeks now blaze on the green banners of Islam, and the two-headed eagle of Byzantium is flaunted across Asia on the standards of a northern Power, while a Russian Tsar sits on the throne of his Viking predecessors of a thousand years ago. Nevertheless, despite such changes of ownership, there is a curious similarity in the antagonism of the two countries then and now, and when the Grand Duke Nicholas flouted Turkish authority in 1902, and, with a protesting Turkish official on board, steered the battleship *Georgi Pobiedonosets* derisively up the Golden Horn, he was unwittingly repeating the insult flung at the city by his ancestor Oleg, ten centuries before, when he hung his shield on the gates of Byzantium in derision of its inhabitants.

As the power of Russia has consolidated and increased, the vigour of the Turk, as of almost every other Asiatic nation, has proportionately declined, and it is thanks only to the rivalry of Western Powers that "the sick man" still sits on the throne at Yildiz. For since Turkey is one of those states which impinge upon the eastern extremity of the Mediterranean, and is laved by the waters of the Persian Gulf, "the integrity of Turkey" has of necessity been the watchword of British policy in this portion of the globe. Twice in the course of the past century has Russia let loose the dogs of war that she might get possession of the keys of the Bosphorus, and twice has Great Britain stepped forth to wrest them from her grasp—once in 1853 by appeal to the arbitrament of war, once again in 1878 by aid of the masterful diplomacy of Lord Beaconsfield.

As a result of this want of success Russia diverted her energy for the time being into other channels, and a whole crop of political questions in Central Asia

immediately came into being; but though frustrated for the time, she still looks with longing eyes at the object of her desire, and no chance which comes in the way of her astute and indefatigable diplomatists for oiling the wheels of her endeavour is ever allowed to pass by.

In the meantime, however, another Power, which, in the days of the Berlin Conference, knew little of and cared less for the attractions of the Near East, has raised its voice in the councils of the Turk, and to-day the trumpet-blast of German ambition resounds through the streets of Constantinople. The blandishments of Count Hatzfeldt, and the ability and force of character of General von Goltz, paved the way for the magnetic personality of the Emperor William II., who was completely successful in securing the friendship of the Sultan, and with the royal visit to Constantinople in 1899 a third Power was hurried incontinently into the forefront of the theatre of Ottoman diplomacy and intrigue.

Needless to say, Russia regarded with feelings of undisguised aversion this latest intruder in the field of her hereditary ambition, and the Russian censor has in nowise prevented Russian opinion from sounding loudly in the Russian press, and a novel solution of the Turkish imbroglio was a short time ago put tentatively forward.

A spark was to be applied to the Ottoman volcano, —that was necessary to create an excuse for active operations,—upon which Russia, with England's acquiescence, should secure the Bosphorus, and England, Russia assenting, should secure Gallipoli and the command of the Dardanelles. With the Bosphorus in her possession, Russia would be content to leave the Mediterranean to others. With Gallipoli fortified and

in British hands, no reasonable grounds for British suspicion of Russia in regard to the Mediterranean could exist. The dominating note which sounded throughout the whole suggestion was jealousy of Germany. "Germany," it ran, "has, it is true, made her appearance in the field. German intrigue at Constantinople has latterly been strongly in evidence, but the solution of the Russian problem can and will be found without particular reference to Germany. The Germans may yet find that they might with profit have been content to wait inevitable developments around the Euxine before putting so many eggs into their Baghdad basket."

The whole scheme is delightful, but—and they are rather big buts—despite the sanguine anticipations of its author, I am inclined to think that Germany would have a good deal to say in any such arrangement, to say nothing of the Turks, who might not unnaturally commit the mistake of supposing that they had some claim to a voice in the matter of the partition of their own country. Finally, all mention of the future of that vast portion of the Ottoman Empire which stretches from the Black Sea on the north to the Red Sea on the south, and from the Mediterranean on the west to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean on the east, is conveniently ignored. The head is to be severed, but what of the trunk? "Where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

The Russian press, moreover, were at considerable pains to lay emphasis upon the incompatibility of British and German interests in general, and in connection with the Baghdad railway in particular, and the chorus of their congratulation, when the cold reception accorded to the scheme by the House of Commons in the spring of 1903 became known, was inde-

corously loud. I have already dealt with this question at some length in a previous chapter, and there is no occasion for me to do more here than to emphasise what I have already said. Germany in sole and undisputed control of Mesopotamia and the hinterland of the Persian Gulf would be bad; but Russia with her long land frontier, already stretching from Armenia to Chinese Turkestan, with its ingrained tendency towards expansion to the south, would be infinitely worse. I have already pointed out that of these two eventualities the chances are at present in favour of the first, and I have also pointed out how it lies in our power to modify such prospective position in our favour. There can be little doubt that the Baghdad railway will eventually be built, and it cannot be too strongly urged that the real reason why this country must participate in such a scheme should not be lost sight of. That reason is no desire to pander to or inordinate affection for Germany, but the protection of our own interests. It is of vital importance that when the time comes for the British Government to reconsider the question of the Baghdad railway, they should secure for this country that voice in the councils of the Imperial Ottoman Railway Company which in her position she has every right to demand. So that, when the history of the question comes to be written, the next generation may accord to the present that measure of gratitude for securing to them a share of control of the land-route to the East, that the present accords to the past for a similar service rendered in connection with the sea-route, which ensured our present position with regard to the Suez Canal.

PERSIA.

The Persian question is by no means a new one. It has been in a state varying from comparative quiescence to feverish activity for more than a century, and receives spasmodic recognition from the British public. The Shah indulges in a meteoric trip to Europe, and the world is all agog to cast a curious eye upon the "King of kings," and to learn something about what it hastily christens the "Persian problem." With his departure public interest ebbs, and except when some more than usually unabashed violation of Persian territory or Persian prerogatives is perpetrated by her northern neighbour, which excites an ephemeral indignation in the British press, the crooked course of Persian progress is relegated willingly enough to the cabinets of statesmen and the chancellories of diplomatists. None the less is the path of Persian progress a difficult and thorny way, for Persia, like China, is being irresistibly swept into the swirling vortex of world movement.

Generally speaking, the position of Persia as regards England and Russia closely resembles that of Turkey, for Persia is the second of those countries with regard to which our policy has been "the maintenance of our predominant influence and the prevention of the expansion of hostile agencies." And it is all the more important from the fact that not only would a hostile Power in possession of Persia be disastrous to British and Indian trade with that country, but it would also render nugatory to some extent the advantages which accrue to us from our supremacy in the Persian Gulf, and would turn the

flank of the land defences of our Indian Empire. "Concessions in the Persian Gulf, whether by positive formal arrangement or by simple neglect of the local commercial interests which now underlie political and military control, will imperil Great Britain's naval situation in the farther East, her political position in India, her commercial interests in both, and the imperial tie between herself and Australasia."[1] Moreover, the blow to British prestige, none too high even now, would in such an eventuality be extremely dangerous, and shake to its foundations the whole structure of British dominion throughout the East.[2]

There is another point of resemblance between the two countries — the pitiable state of their present impotence as compared with the splendour of their past. Time was when the fame of a great Shah[3] rang clarion-like through all lands, when a Russian Tsar thought it no dishonour to borrow from a Persian king,[4] and when a monarch of Iran contemptuously ordered the impure footprints left by an

[1] The Persian Gulf and International Relations. Captain A. T. Mahan.

[2] All who are acquainted with the East are well aware how sensitive an instrument is the pulse of public feeling in Asiatic countries. A correspondent writing from Quetta at the outset of hostilities in the Far East says: "It is extraordinary the exact information the people in the bazaars have of the relative forces of Russia and Japan. Our frontier men are keen politicians. . . . The firm alliance between Japan and Britain while Russia and Japan were evidently drifting into war, created the warmest feeling of admiration for our country, while it excited some astonishment. The result of the Japanese victories has been to raise British prestige higher than even a successful frontier campaign could have done."

[3] Shah Abbas the Great, under whom modern Persia reached its highest pinnacle of renown.

[4] The Tsar Michael Romanoff was reduced to such straits in the first years of his reign that in 1617 he borrowed 7000 roubles from Shah Abbas.

English envoy on the soil of the sacred palace as he retired from the Persian Court to be effaced with a basin of sand![1]

With the swing of the pendulum of time the tables have been rudely turned, the resources of Persia are heavily mortgaged to her former debtor, the antics of her court recall the buffooneries of an English sovereign when surprised, in the midst of frivolity and feasting in company with the ladies of his seraglio, by the thunder of the guns of Holland in the Medway and the Thames, and, far from the "impure footprints" being effaced, an ill-disguised impatience was exhibited for the arrival of the expected envoy, bearing a coveted decoration from England's king.

It must be admitted that English statesmen and the British public have at times shown a woeful lack of proper appreciation of the part which Persia is destined to play in "Middle Eastern" developments. Periods of feverish concern in the affairs of the dominions of the "King of kings" have alternated with epochs of equally distracting apathy, so much so that one of the ablest of English writers on Eastern matters has been led into raising his voice in a scathing jeremiad against public callousness. "If, then," wrote Sir Henry Rawlinson in the 'Sixties, "there was danger to British India from the attitude and possible designs of Russia twenty-eight years ago, that danger must be

[1] The envoy was Jenkinson, one of the company of merchant adventurers which had been formed in the reign of Edward VI. to discover "regions, kingdoms, islands, and places unknown and unvisited by the highway of the sea." Their first venture took them to that strange sea girding the north-eastern countries of Europe, spoken of by Tacitus as "a sluggish mere and motionless—which forms the girdle of the world, where you hear the sound of sun-rising!" and cast them eventually on the coast of Russia. The result was the opening up of commercial intercourse between England and Russia and the little-known lands beyond. The Shah was Shah Tahmasp, and the year 1562.

increased a hundredfold at the present day; yet so far from being now betrayed into any paroxysm of alarm, . . . her proceedings fail even to excite our curiosity, and we seem, as far as the public is concerned, to await the threatened contact of the two empires with supreme indifference."[1]

One of the most gratifying symptoms in British policy in recent times is perhaps the intimation that her statesmen have at length realised the vital importance of laying down and carrying out a definite policy in matters relating to her Indian neighbours. British prestige in Persia was at a low ebb when I first visited that country in 1900 and 1901. We had been given a great chance, but, with a singular failure to grasp its real significance, we allowed it to pass to our rivals. A combination of British narrowness and Russian insistence, assisted, as I am well aware, by Persian duplicity, placed the country financially—and finance is the alpha and omega of Persian politics—under the thumb of Russia. Persia required money, and she applied to England for a loan. English capitalists were shy and held aloof,—they doubtless held vivid memories of the shock administered to the London market in 1890 in connection with the notorious "state lotteries" concession,—and the Government, instead of hailing with delight the chance they were actually begged to accept, delayed. The policy of investing money outside the empire was perhaps in the opinion of pedantic professors contrary to the tenets of sound economy, and the Foreign Office would accept as surety nothing less than control of the customs by British officials, a privilege which Persia was in no position to concede. And so, baffled in her endeavour to raise money in England, she turned to the only alternative

[1] England and Russia in the East.

source, and the Russian loan of £2,500,000 of 1900, the harbinger of more to follow, became an accomplished fact. Nor was this all. Persian Cossacks under Russian officers formed the nucleus, and indeed the only serviceable asset, of the Persian army; Russian doctors accompanied by Russian Cossacks were parading ostentatiously through Eastern Persia—danger of plague from India was the excuse; Russian bounties were pushing Russian trade from one end of the country to the other; and the Russian Banque des Prêts, since rechristened the Banque d'Escompte, an agency of the Russian Minister of Finance, with a strong and significant resemblance to the Russo-Chinese Bank in another sphere, was entering upon that policy of cut-throat competition with the Imperial Bank of Persia—the one British institution of importance surviving in the country—which is being pursued with relentless persistency to the present day. Moreover, the so-called secret convention of 1890, which gave to Russia the control of railway construction for a period of ten years, had been further renewed, so as to hold good until 1905 or, as the Persians themselves aver, until 1910. British prestige was indeed at a discount.

There are signs, however, that the tide has turned. The game that is being played is an uphill one, it is true. Many of the factors above enumerated, which have undermined British influence, are still there, and others, such as the commercial treaty of 1902, of which I have already written in an earlier chapter, have been added; but some things have been said—definitely and officially—and, what is still more important, some few things have been done, which have not been without their effect both upon the Persians themselves and upon their neighbours on the north, and it was impossible when travelling in the country in 1903 to be insensible

to certain indications of a recrudescence of British power.

I have outlined briefly—how briefly I am only too well aware—the difficulties we have to face, and the disadvantages from which we suffer. It remains for me, in bringing to a conclusion this short survey of the situation in Persia, to make rapid mention of what has been said and what has been done to counteract and to overcome them.

In the first place, the British Government have taken their courage in their hands, and, *mirabile dictu*, have declared a policy. In 1902 the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs laid it down that it would be impossible for us, whatever the cause, to abandon what we look upon as our rightful position in Persia. "Especially is that true in regard to the Persian Gulf. It is true not only of the Persian Gulf but of the southern provinces of Persia and those provinces which border on our Indian Empire. Our rights there and our position of ascendancy we cannot abandon." It is satisfactory to observe that it is here realised that British interests do not reach their limit with the high-water mark of the wild sea-waves, and that for securing the natural rights of India "purely naval control is a very imperfect instrument, unless supported and re-inforced by the shores on which it acts."[1] And this declaration was repeated and emphasised by Lord Lansdowne in May 1903, when speaking upon the question in the House of Lords: "I say it without hesitation, we should regard the establishment of a naval base or of a fortified port in the Persian Gulf by any other Power as a very grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal."

[1] The Persian Gulf and International Relations. Captain A. T. Mahan.

That, at any rate, is satisfactory. We have a definite declaration of policy, and all the world now knows the attitude of his Majesty's Government towards any Power endeavouring to encroach upon declared British interests, so long at least as the Government that made it remains in power—a contingency which, unfortunately, has to be postulated in any declaration of British policy. But words unsupported by deeds are of little value, and it is in the outward and visible signs of the intention and purpose lying behind mere oratorical declamation that men judge the worth and probable results of any policy. Here, too, recent years have been fruitful of much that is satisfactory. The declaration of Lord Lansdowne concerning the Persian Gulf found concrete embodiment in the royal progress of an Indian Viceroy through its waters—an expression of actual power so pregnant of meaning to the oriental understanding. No cryptic utterances were those that fell from the lips of Lord Curzon as he defined the position of Great Britain for the benefit of the littoral chiefs: "We were here before any other Power in modern times had shown its face in these waters; we found strife, and we have created order; it was our commerce as well as your security that was threatened and called for protection at every port along the coasts; the subjects of the King of England still reside and trade with you; the great Empire of India, which it is our duty to defend, lies almost at your gates; we saved you from extinction at the hands of your neighbours; we opened these seas to the ships of all nations, and enabled their flags to fly in peace; we have not seized or held your territory; we have not destroyed your independence, but preserved it." [1]

Such were the dictions of the highest representative

[1] Lord Curzon at Shargah.

of British sovereignty in Asia to the dwellers on the Persian and Arab littoral, supported by the guns and turrets of British men-of-war. And the people, potentate and pirate, peasant and pauper, saw, and, seeing, they believed. Should any doubt be cast upon the motive actuating the Viceroy's journey to the Persian Gulf, the Indian Budget speech of March 1904 is on record to dispel it: "This is the secret of the whole position in Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet, . . . and the whole of our policy during the past five years has been directed towards maintaining our predominant influence and to preventing the expansion of hostile agencies on this area which I have described. *It was for this reason that I visited that old field of British energy and influence in the Persian Gulf.*"

There was all the external pomp and circumstance so necessary in impressing any particular lesson on the tablets of an oriental brain, both in the Viceroy's tour to the Persian Gulf and in the Garter mission to the capital,—the former illustrative of the predominance of Great Britain on the seas, the latter of the friendship existing between the Governments of London and Teherân. But there have been other incidents which, though lacking the halo of public acclamation,—the fanfare of trumpets and black-letter headlines being absent,—are indicative of the intention of this country to prepare for eventualities.

In the gulf itself the suborned Turkish attacks upon the independence of Koweit, by far the finest harbour in those regions, were successfully defeated by the prompt appearance upon the scene of British war-ships, and the occupants of the two armed dhows which swooped down upon the territory of the Sheik in the dead of a September night (1902) were dispersed—though not without the loss of a British bluejacket—by

the timely arrival and vigorous action of the commander of H.M.S. *Lapwing*.

In the hinterland British activity has likewise been displayed. We have a right by agreement with the Persian Government, whenever railway construction takes place in Persia, to construct, or procure the construction of, railways in the southern part of that country, and such agreement, "though it may not be recorded in any very formal manner," is looked upon by the British Government as "a binding engagement on the part of the Persian Government."[1] With regard to roads, a British company, with the title of "the Persian Road Company," has lately been formed to take over the concession held by the Imperial Bank for building roads from Kum to the Karun, and from the same place to Ispahân; and as a concrete example of British enterprise, the "Lynch road," between Ahwaz on the Karun and Ispahân, the offspring of an agreement arrived at in 1898, under the auspices of the British Legation, has recently come into being. Another feature in connection with ways and communications is the convention providing for the construction, by the staff of the Indo-European Telegraph Department under the Government of India, of a British line from Kashan to the frontier of Baluchistan.

In the field of commerce a vast concession for exploiting the oil-fields of the whole of the south of Persia has been secured by a British company, a vice-consulate has been established at Kermanshah,—which, indeed, should have been done long ago, seeing that it commands one of the chief avenues of British trade,—and in the course of the last four years consular officials have been appointed, or have received increased rank and pay at Bandar Abbas, Sistan, Bahrein, Shiraz,

[1] Speech by Lord Lansdowne in the House of Lords, May 5, 1903.

Tabriz, and Ispahân. Last, but not least, a trade-route has been opened up from India across the dividing gulf of Baluchistan, though this, it must be admitted, has political and strategic aspects in excess of its commercial possibilities, and is worthy, therefore, of a few remarks.

I have given a detailed description of the Nushki-Sistan route, which I travelled over in November 1900, in another volume.[1] Its possibilities as an avenue of trade appeared at one time to be considerable, and, despite the recent Persian tariff, are still no doubt not to be despised. But it cannot be denied that, apart from its political and strategic importance, the Nushki caravan-route never was and never will be a particularly inspiring undertaking. This opinion is corroborated by Mr H. W. Maclean, the commissioner appointed by the Commercial Intelligence Committee of the Board of Trade to visit Persia and inquire into the openings for British trade in that country. "The opinion generally expressed to me by Meshed traders who have tried both routes was," writes Mr Maclean, "that the additional expenses incurred *viâ* Nushki made the total charges by that route quite as heavy as on the Bandar Abbas route." And again, while admitting that some of the disadvantages unavoidable in the case of a new route may disappear, he opines that their removal "will still leave this route at a disadvantage with the older routes *viâ* Bandar Abbas and Bushire. These considerations lead me to the conclusion that the Sistan route is not of any commercial utility to direct British trade, and in existing circumstances is at the best only an alternative route for Indian commerce." Hardly an inspiring horoscope for a commercial undertaking!

The fact is, as I have frequently urged, that while

[1] Sport and Politics under an Eastern Sky.

commercial and political interests in Persia are practically indissociable, the political element in the Nushki route is the preponderating one. That this is the view taken by the Indian Government is demonstrated incidentally by the fact that, contrary to the essentially technical advice of telegraphist experts who inclined to the alignment Quetta-Ladis in preference to that of Quetta-Robat for the new line of telegraph, the latter was the one eventually selected, in spite of its greater distance and greater estimated cost both in capital sunk and in future annual expenditure.[1] This line was completed from Quetta to Robat on the Persian frontier, and an office opened there early in the present year.

The Russian press were likewise not slow to see the political importance of the enterprise; and the announcement that the Secretary of State for India had given his sanction to the construction of a line from Quetta to Nushki in the autumn of 1902 was greeted with a chorus of hysterical denunciation from the Russian organs.[2] The Government was urged to take steps

[1] The distance from Quetta to Ladis was given as 430 miles, and from Quetta to Robat as 478 miles; while the estimated capital cost of line and offices for the former was Rs. 9,79,000, and for the latter Rs. 11,30,500; and the estimated annual maintenance charges for the former Rs. 34,000, and for the latter Rs. 35,500.

[2] The construction of the Quetta-Nushki railway of 82½ miles in length was sanctioned in August 1902 at an estimated cost of about Rs. 70,00,000, or Rs. 85,000 per mile. Leaving the existing Bolan railway at a point 12 miles from Quetta and 3 miles from Spezand, the line will encounter three mountain barriers—the Chiltan, the Mashelak, and the southern tail of the Khwaja Amram,—crossing the intervening plains of Mastung and Shahrud. The steepest grades are 1 in 50, compensated for curvature, and the sharpest curve will have a 573-foot radius. Sanction was received from the Secretary of State for at once putting in hand the Nishpa tunnel, 2600 feet long, 5 miles from the point of departure, and the heavy works in the Sheik Wasil Gorge, between miles 27 and 32, at an expenditure of Rs. 4,75,000. The Nishpa tunnel is now finished, and the laying of the line is being taken in hand.

"to paralyse our rivals," and the 'Novoe Vremya' did not hesitate to describe the Quetta-Nushki railway as the beginning of a line which would eventually place the British on the flank of what it describes as "the probable path of Russian advance on India." Candour with a vengeance, recalling a comment of Lord Curzon a decade ago: "When the cat is to be let out of the bag, commend me to a Russian newspaper for the uncompromising manner in which it is performed." Once more has the 'Novoe Vremya' been stirred to remonstrance — this time, seemingly, by the Anglo-Persian Boundary Commission, which still bides amid the physical and climatic delights of Sistan. This time — September 1903 — a bitter refrain runs through the plaint: "And yet if Russia allows Great Britain to strengthen its influence in Sistan and South-East Persia, then we are preparing for ourselves a dismal solution of the Central Asian Question."

All this is of course a little premature. All that has so far been taken in hand is a short line 82½ miles in length from the Quetta plateau to Nushki, which place is itself more than 300 miles from the Persian frontier. At the same time it cannot be too strongly urged that such a line should be continued across Baluchistan. The trade-route as it is can, as I have been at some pains to point out, only be regarded as a questionable success. The construction of a railway would not only develop and fortify our commercial interests and political prestige in South and East Persia, but it would place us in a position to take that part in the future railway development of Persia which will some day inevitably devolve upon us. If I might venture to suggest a strategical advantage attaching to such a consummation, it is

that we should be securely placed on the flank of any attack directed against Kandahar from the North.

Space forbids that I should enlarge further upon the question of Persia. There is, however, one more suggestion to be made, though I have no very great confidence in its being entertained, and that is, that the British Government should become the shareholders of the Imperial Bank of Persia. The bank is the one influential British institution still extant in Persia, the one weapon which it is still in her power, if she will, to wield with some effect; and Russia, well aware that this is so, is doing all she can through the Banque d'Escompte to cut the ground from under it. There was a provision in the negotiations connected with the Russian loan by which Persia was deprived of the power of borrowing from any other nation until Russia had been paid off. But this could not possibly be held to prevent her from borrowing from her own bank. Indeed there is every reason to believe that the Persian treasury, the contents of whose coffers are scattered abroad with such reckless levity, has been to some extent thus replenished since the Russian loan; and I need hardly point out the possibilities that would follow upon such an arrangement as I have suggested, of rectifying, as far as rectification is now possible, the financial blunder of 1900.

I have painted a brighter picture of the Persian problem than is usually done, and I have laid stress upon those points — the things that Great Britain is doing — which are usually ignored. I do not for a moment wish it to be inferred that I am unaware of the gloomy side. If Great Britain is up and doing, Russia is doing too. No one who travels in the country can fail to be aware of that.

But I do not, I admit, take the ultra pessimistic view that too often colours the works of writers upon the question, and I do not by any means find it impossible to fall in with the belief expressed by his Majesty's Minister for Foreign Affairs when he said, "If there have been changes of late, those changes have been, on the whole, in the direction of the assertion and the protection of British interests," and I welcome the expression of hope which he at the same time vouchsafed, that as time goes on we may be able to make further progress in the same direction.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A TIBETAN EPISODE.

A mystery-enshrouded land — Europeans who have seen Lhassa — The Sikkim Convention of 1893—Waddell's definition of Lamaism—Sarat Chandra Das—Decision of the India Office—Failure of the negotiations for sending an official mission to Tibet—Tibetan aggression—Fatuous policy of the British Government—The Calcutta Convention of 1890—Tibetan disregard of the Convention of 1890—The sham of Chinese suzerainty—The views of the Government of India in 1899—The Viceroy's letter to the Dalai Lama returned unopened—The appearance of Russia—A supposed Russo-Chinese convention—Negotiations at Khamba Jong—An advance to Gyangtse sanctioned—Tibetan belief in the support of Russia—Gyangtse occupied—The advance to Lhassa begun—The policy of the Government of India—A possible solution of the Tibetan puzzle—The case of Bokhara an analogy—The Tibetan dispute must be settled without reference to other Powers.

FROM earliest times an impenetrable curtain of mystery has enshrouded the remote highlands of Tibet. Nature herself has reared her icy barriers round this strange enchanted land, and her people have taken advantage to the full of her natural impenetrability. And so strange stories have been woven round the people behind the veil, their customs and their lives, and the mysterious religion which they practise. A few intrepid travellers, it is true, have at odd times pierced through the curtain of obscurity which envelops the sacred haunt of Buddhistic lore. In 1811, Manning, the single Englishman able to boast of the achievement, penetrated to the heart of the country and set

foot in the holy city of Lhassa, and in 1845 the Lazarist fathers Gabet and Huc were likewise successful in effecting a lodgment in the capital; but after the forcible expulsion of the latter the veil was allowed to fall once more, and for sixty years no single representative of the West has succeeded in disturbing the unruffled calm—as far, that is, as external influences are concerned—which has for the whole of that period brooded over the hierarchy at Lhassa.[1] There were those who saw in the Sikkim Convention of 1893 the golden key that was to unlock for them the gates of the forbidden land; but such sanguine expectation was based on a defective knowledge of the people, and it has been left for the twentieth century to supply the weapon with which to cut the Gordian knot of Tibetan exclusiveness.

Truth to tell, he would have to be of a peculiar disposition who could see in the barren stony wastes that constitute so large a portion of Tibet the land of any one's desire; nor indeed can it be said that in the religion of that country is to be found any foundation for the weird tales of the supernatural to which it has given rise. Lamaism provides something of interest, it is true; but it provides much that is sordid as well, as is inevitable in any form of demonology.[2] And perhaps the best that can be said of it has already been said by the author of the 'Buddhism

[1] Though no European succeeded in reaching Lhassa during this period, it was visited on more than one occasion by native surveyors in the service of the Indian Government. Nain Sing, an intrepid explorer who has added much to our knowledge of the country, was there in January 1866 and again in November 1874, and a semi-Tibetan in the same service led a small party there in March 1872. The babu Sarat Chandra Das was also successful in reaching the capital.

[2] For some account of a personal visit to one of the weird performances, half-serious, half-comic, that are enacted in Tibet, see 'Sport and Politics under an Eastern Sky,' pp. 109-112.

of Tibet,'[1] when he wrote that "Lamaism is, indeed, a microcosm of the growth of religion and myth among primitive people, and in large degree an object-lesson of their advance from barbarism towards civilisation. And it preserves for us much of the old-world lore and petrified beliefs of our Aryan ancestors."

It is not, however, the religion or customs of Tibet that occupy me now: it is the political situation to which the proceedings of its rulers have given rise that I am engaged in portraying here.

It is worthy of remark that prior to 1885 the Bengali babu, Sarat Chandra Das, had on two occasions paid successful visits to the authorities at Lhassa, and with care and tact it is only natural to suppose that the thin end of the wedge thus entered might have been successfully driven home. Of his own expeditions the babu has himself left record in an interesting volume, which has had the advantage in its revision of the valuable services of so competent an authority as Mr W. W. Rockhill. The object aimed at was at that time of course trade, and, as I have said, commercial relations might no doubt have followed upon the peaceful missions of Chandra Das, who had become a *persona grata* with certain lamas of high position, from whom he had received a cordial invitation to return to their country. But other counsels prevailed, and the India Office, contrary, it is said, to the expressed wishes of the Government of India, became impregnated with a desire to despatch an official mission to Lhassa.

The whole of the subsequent proceedings can only be described as resulting in a dismal and humiliating fiasco, and there can be little doubt that it is in the first instance ourselves that we have to thank for the present imbroglio in Tibet.

[1] L. Austine Waddell, M.B.

A STREET OF CHIFU.

Amid a preliminary flourish of trumpets the British envoy proceeded to Peking with the ostensible object of applying for a passport, a proceeding which immediately aroused the easily awakened suspicions of China. Why this unnecessary journey to the capital was embarked upon it is difficult to imagine. According to the Chifu Convention of September 1876, the British envoy was entitled to a passport, and no personal application was in the remotest degree necessary.[1] However that may be, one thing is in no way open to doubt, that from this moment the expectations of the mission were doomed. The passport was of course granted,—it could not very well be refused,—but the intricate wheels of the Chinese diplomatic machine were promptly set in motion to render abortive the permission thereby ostensibly granted. The Inspector-General of Customs—the hero of a hundred diplomatic *coups*[2]—was once more called in aid, and to such purpose that the India Office were constrained to

[1] The article of the Chifu Convention of 1876 dealing with the question of a contemplated British mission of exploration reads as follows: "If the mission . . . should be proceeding across the Indian frontier to Tibet, the Tsung-li Yamen, on receipt of a communication to the above effect from the British Minister, will write to the Chinese Resident in Tibet, and the Resident, with due regard to the circumstances, will send officers to take due care of the mission; and passports for the mission will be issued by the Tsung-li Yamen, that its passage be not obstructed."

[2] It would be difficult to say how much the Chinese owe to Sir Robert Hart for the facility he has shown in extricating them from the unfortunate complications into which they are always falling with Western Powers. In the same year in which he was induced to rid them of the inconvenient mission to Tibet he was engaged in patching up a peace between China and France. The announcement of the successful conclusion of these negotiations is characteristically described by Professor Douglas. "Nine months ago," said Sir Robert Hart, addressing the members of the Tsung-li Yamen, "you authorised me to open negotiations for peace, and now——" "the baby is born," said the Ministers, before he could proceed further. "Yes," said Sir Robert Hart, "the preliminaries of peace are arranged."

revoke their decision, thereby hammering the first nail into the Tibetan coffin of British prestige.

For a while the question of Tibet was allowed to slumber, but the next move was of a very different nature, consisting of an absolutely uncalled-for act of aggression against British Sikkim on the part of the people of Tibet. The first-fruits of the fatuous action of 1885 had been born.

Once more did we, by our failure to seize the opportunity thus offered of settling once for all the question of Tibet, lay up for ourselves trouble for the future. India had been invaded, but rather than take prompt action by sending a small force to Lhassa—a proceeding which would have had the desired effect of dispelling the unfortunate illusion, which had become engrafted on the Tibetan mind as a result of our previous incompetency, that Great Britain could be treated with contempt,—we preferred to fall back upon that prodigious expedient for passing time—Chinese diplomacy. The home Government, in fact—as distinguished from Indian statesmen on the spot—continued to be ruled, as Mr Michie remarks, "by influences which were neither military, nor political, nor practical."[1]

The net result of an incalculable waste of foolscap indulged in by the two countries during the next few years was the Calcutta Convention of 1890, supplemented by the Sikkim trade convention of 1893. By the Convention of 1890 the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet was decided, the British protectorate over Sikkim was recognised, and British and Chinese joint commissioners were appointed to draw up arrangements for providing increased facilities for trade, to decide the question of pasturage on the Sikkim side of the frontier, and to determine the method in which official

[1] The Englishman in China.

communications between the British authorities in India and the authorities in Tibet should be conducted. Three weary years dragged their tedious length along before these points of discussion found solution; but at length an agreement was patched up and signed in December 1893, an arrangement which it is well to observe might just as well have never been concluded, since by no stretch of imagination can it be said that it has ever been observed. Under the terms of the convention a trade mart was established at a place which never has been, and from the nature of its site never could be, a real market—namely, Yatung—and free trade, except in the case of certain prohibited articles, was sanctioned for a period of five years.

Both the Convention of 1890 and the subsequent trade regulations of 1893 have been contemptuously disregarded by the Tibetans, who have persistently ignored the boundary therein agreed upon, removed the landmarks set up, and contravened the regulations with regard to trade. In face of the article stipulating for free trade for a period of five years, the *jongpen* of Phari was found to be gaily levying a 10 per cent *ad valorem* duty on all goods that passed through his district, and preventing Tibetan merchants from passing beyond that place with their goods, a proceeding on his part which, as the Government of Bengal very sensibly remarked, undoubtedly seemed "to be inconsistent with the terms of the treaty." The utter worthlessness of Yatung as a market was set forth by the commissioner of the Rajshahi division in a letter to the Government of Bengal, dated June 30, 1896: "It is a mistake to connect it [the increase of trade] with the provision made in the regulations of 1893 for the opening of a trade mart at Yatung, as no mart has,

in fact, been established. Some merchants visited that place from India during the year for the purpose of trade, but they had to return without doing any business, as the Tibetans were prohibited by their officials from meeting them."

So the arrangements of 1890 and 1893 were studiously ignored, as indeed was only to be expected, since the people who ignored them were in no way responsible for them, and had never been anything but opposed to them. China, in other words, had stood sponsor for Tibet, and China, however loud her protestations, was in no position to do so, a fact which had not dawned upon the understanding of the negotiators of 1890 and 1893. It came home later, it is true, which is why we are now dealing with Tibet.

In 1899 the Government of India summed up the situation as it had been summed up many times before: "No real progress has as yet been made towards the settlement of the frontier, while the stipulations as to trade have been practically inoperative." But there was a healthy sign visible in the same despatch, for the sham of Chinese suzerainty was at length officially laid bare: "We do not desire to conceal from your lordship our opinion that negotiations with the Chinese Resident—although they now have the sanction of long usage, and although the attempts that have so far been made to open direct communication with the Tibetan authorities have resulted in failure—are not likely to be productive of any serious result." The whole question rested on an unsatisfactory basis. Applications to Tibet were referred to the Chinese Resident, while applications to the latter were put off on the plea of his inability to put any pressure on Tibet, and there can be few who will not

agree with the Government of India that as a policy this appeared to be "both unproductive and inglorious."[1] What was an urgent necessity was that both China and Tibet should plainly understand that as the suzerain Power was unable to see that treaties were observed, we should be obliged to enforce their observance for ourselves, and that as the Chinese were unable to exercise the requisite authority over their dependency, it was necessary for Great Britain to deal direct with such dependency itself. This principle was recognised by the Government of India and approved by Lord Salisbury at the end of 1899.

So far the question was confined to Great Britain, China, and Tibet. Lamaist obstruction had been allowed a liberal lease of life, but it could not be expected that so unsatisfactory a state of affairs should be allowed to continue for ever. A crowning insult was added when the Dalai-Lama returned unopened a letter from the Viceroy of India, and there is no doubt that the Government of India fully realised that the time had come when stronger measures must be resorted to.

At this juncture a new figure flashed comet-like on to the Tibetan stage, and developments arose which had for immediate effect the raising of the hitherto little-considered state to a position of international

[1] This state of affairs was admirably explained in the despatch already quoted: "We regard the so-called suzerainty of China over Tibet as a constitutional fiction—a political affectation which has only been maintained because of its convenience to both parties. China is always ready to break down the barriers of ignorance and obstruction, and to open Tibet to the civilising influence of trade; but her pious wishes are defeated by the short-sighted stupidity of the lamas. In the same way Tibet is only too anxious to meet our advances, but she is prevented from doing so by the despotic veto of the suzerain. This solemn farce has been re-enacted with a frequency that seems never to deprive it of its attractions or its power to impose."

prominence. Russia had arrived, and when the curtain rang up on the Tibetan drama of 1900 it was to display Russia figuring only too prominently upon the boards. From this time on it became not merely a question of settling trade disputes with an obstructive and ignorant people, but of preventing hostile agencies from taking root beneath the walls of our Indian frontier.[1]

Russia's first card was the reception by Russia's Tsar of a mission from Tibet, and Russia's second card was of a like nature. The first mission, consisting of a Russian *buriat*, Aharamba-Agvan-Dorgieff, who had ingratiated himself with the authorities at Lhassa, and secured the title of first Tsanit Hamba to the Dalai-Lama of Tibet, was received by the Tsar in October 1900. The second mission, granted an imperial audience in July 1901, was a much more imposing affair, consisting of a number of Tibetan officials, described as envoys extraordinary of the Dalai-Lama of Tibet. It may be said that under ordinary circumstances there was nothing particularly disquieting in such an event. That may well be; but the circumstances were by no means ordinary. Tibet does not abut upon any Russian territory, Lhassa is upwards of 1000 miles from any Russian possession, while it is, on the other hand, but a short distance from the Indian frontier, and, as coterminous states, we have necessarily special interests in the country; and yet, while the Grand Pontiff of Lhassa returns unopened an autograph letter

[1] See the Viceroy's speech on the Budget, already frequently referred to: "This [the prevention of the expansion of hostile agencies on the Indian border-lands] also is in part the explanation of our movement into Tibet; although the attitude of the Tibetan Government, its persistent disregard of treaty obligations, and its contemptuous retort to our extreme patience, would in any case have compelled a more active vindication of our interests."

from an Indian Viceroy, he sends autograph letters by the hands of special envoys to the statesmen on the Neva.

The case was obviously one for inquiry, and when a year later reports became current of a secret Russo-Chinese agreement relating to Tibet, involving a virtual Russian protectorate over the country, a definite denial from the former Power became imperative. In the first instance, Count Lamsdorff declared that the mission "could not be regarded as having any political or diplomatic character." He had, he admitted, received an autograph letter from the Dalai-Lama, which, however, contained nothing of very grave import. It was, in fact, found on translation to merely express a hope that he—Count Lamsdorff—was in enjoyment of good health and prosperous, and to inform him that the Dalai-Lama was happy to be able to say that he himself enjoyed excellent health! The reports of any agreement about Tibet were categorically denied by both the Chinese and Russian Governments, and the origin of such reports — 'The China Times' actually gave the text of the agreement in twelve articles![1]—remained a mystery.

[1] The articles of the alleged Russo-Chinese agreement relating to Tibet, as published by 'The China Times' in July 1902, even if, like the will of Peter the Great, apocryphal, afford interesting reading. The most important items are as follows:—

I. "The Chinese Government, conscious that China's power is weakening, agrees to relinquish her entire interest in Tibet, with all privileges and benefits, to Russia, in exchange for Russian support and assistance in maintaining the Chinese Empire."

II. "In the event of any trouble occurring in the interior of China which the Chinese Government finds itself unable to cope with, Russia undertakes to suppress it."

IV. "Russia will hereafter establish Government officers in Tibet, and control Tibetan affairs."

VIII. "Chinese merchandise imported into Tibet shall be either duty free or very lightly taxed."

Nevertheless, in spite of Russian denials of any dealings with Tibet, she left no room for doubt as to the interest she took in that country, and in February 1903 she took occasion to take Great Britain brusquely to task on account of a supposed military expedition which she was informed had been despatched across the Indian frontier. "In view of the very great importance which the Imperial Russian Government attaches to the avoidance of any cause of trouble in China, it would consider such an expedition into Tibet as calculated to produce a situation of considerable gravity, which might eventually force the Russian Government to take measures for the protection of its interests in those regions." And this was the Government which had not hesitated to despoil China of the vast territory of Manchuria!

The "authoritative information" of the supposed expedition was without the slightest foundation, and it is not surprising to find Lord Lansdowne characterising the language of the Russian Embassy as "unusual and almost minatory in tone." It is refreshing to find the Foreign Office taking a firm stand, and to hear it declaring that, in view of our special interests in Tibet, it followed that should there be any display of Russian activity in that country, we should be obliged to reply by a display of activity not only equivalent to but exceeding that made by Russia.

Nevertheless, in spite of such declarations, Russian officiousness made itself felt, as may be seen from the despatches from the India Office, dated February 27 and May 28 respectively. In the former it is admitted

XI. "All mining and railway interests will be in Russian hands, but Chinese will be allowed to participate."

XII. "Russia undertakes in the construction of railway lines or forts not to destroy or interfere with temples or other sacred spots."

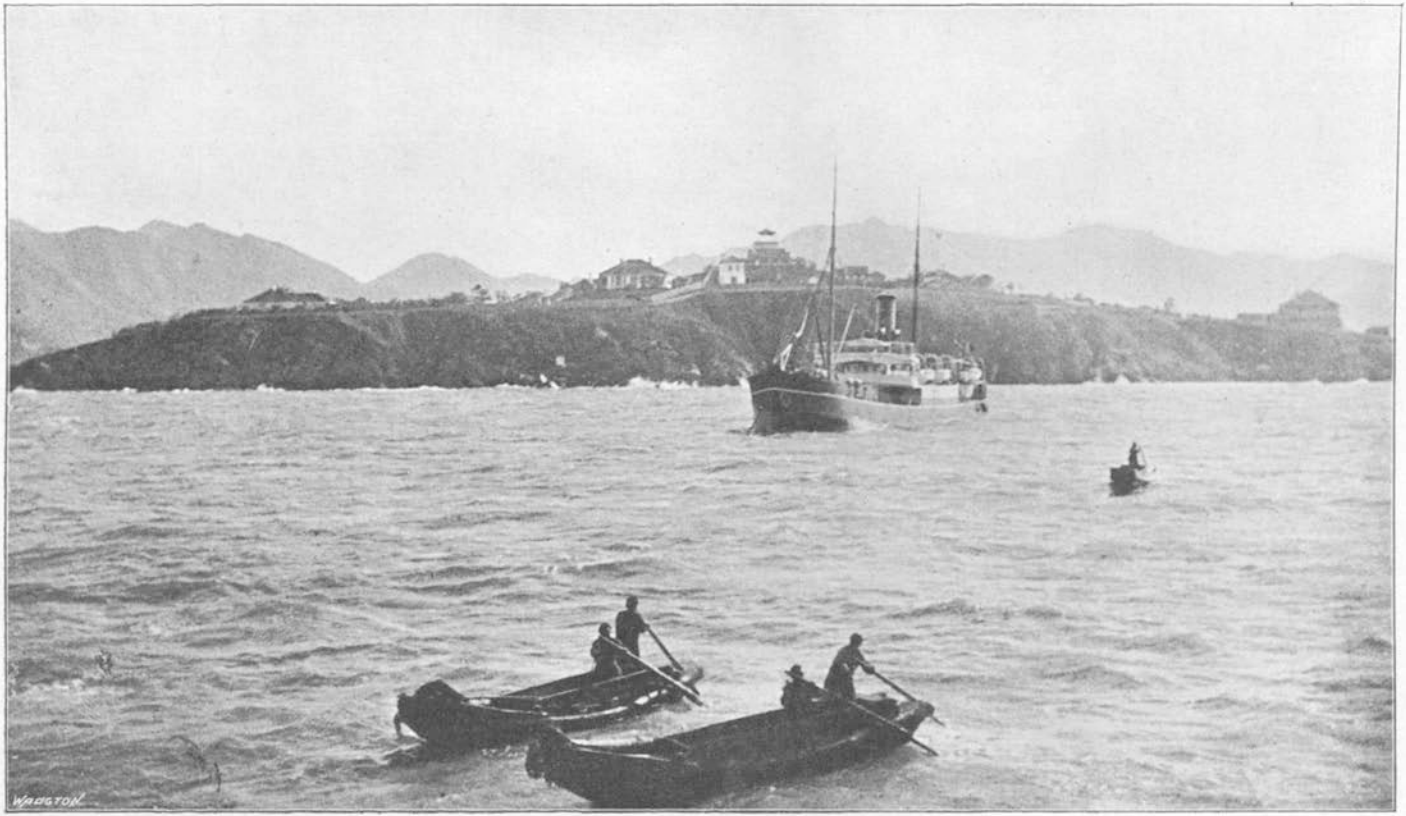
that the question at issue is no longer one of details as to trade and boundaries, "but the whole question of the future political relations of India with Tibet." Russian influence is seen towards the end of the despatch. The proposals of the Indian Government to send an armed mission to Tibet and to establish a Resident at Lhassa might, it is admitted, be justified as a legitimate reply to the action of the Tibetan Government were the issue simply one between India and Tibet, and the despatch concludes with the statement that, after hearing from the Russian Government, his Majesty's Government "will be in a better position to decide on the scope to be given to the negotiations with China, and on the steps to be taken to protect India against any danger from the establishment of foreign influence in Tibet." By the end of May, when the second despatch alluded to was sent, the "Russian terror" had sunk deeper into the official mind, and the old timidity and pliability before Russian bluster is again apparent. Whereas it was recognised in the former despatch that the issue at stake was "the whole question of the future political relations of India with Tibet," it is now laid down as the wish of the Government that "the negotiations should be restricted to questions concerning trade relations, the frontier, and grazing rights," and a desire is expressed that no proposal should be made for the establishment of a political agent either at Gyangtse or Lhassa.

The result was that negotiations were again resorted to, though on this occasion Khamba Jong, the place selected by the Government of India, was sanctioned as the point of meeting of the British and the Chinese and Tibetan envoys, and the essential principle was recognised of Tibet being represented in the negotiations by a duly accredited Tibetan representative. Needless

to say, the same old story was repeated, innumerable excuses for delay were hatched in the fertile Chinese brain, and the Tibetans, less versed in the art of polite diplomacy than their more accomplished co-commissioners, uncompromisingly refused to negotiate at all. Moreover, they proceeded to emphasise their contempt for diplomatic subterfuge by deciding upon war in the National Council at Lhassa, by collecting soldiers with every display of hostility, and by casting two unoffending British subjects incontinently into prison.

By October 1903 it seems to have at last dawned upon Downing Street that the Government of India did, after all, perhaps know something about Indian affairs and India's neighbours, and in November his Majesty's Government reluctantly sanctioned the advance of the mission to Gyangtse, though they at the same time repeated that they were not prepared to sanction any form of permanent intervention in Tibetan affairs.

So accustomed had those concerned become to find invariable success crown their policy of trifling with Great Britain, that the news of the above decision came upon the Chinese Foreign Office as an absolute bolt from the blue. The Wai-wu Pu, electrified to action, fell to telegraphing wildly to the new Amban, who had been appointed to proceed to Lhassa and to take charge of the Tibetan question generally, and who was wandering unconcernedly among the deserts and oases of the interior, to hasten by forced marches to his post, and exact obedience from the Government of Tibet to the imperial commands forthwith to resume negotiations with the British commissioners. The communication made to the Chinese Minister did indeed seem, as his Majesty's Minister at Peking somewhat dryly remarked, "to have awakened the Chinese Government



CHIFU HARBOUR.

out of their apathy." Russia, of course, took violent and unreasoning exception to the action of the British Government, so much so that Lord Lansdowne felt constrained to remark to the Russian Ambassador that it seemed to him "beyond measure strange that these protests should be made by the Government of a Power which had, all over the world, never hesitated to encroach upon its neighbours when the circumstances seemed to require it," and to ask "if the Russian Government had a right to complain of us for taking steps in order to obtain reparation from the Tibetans by advancing into Tibetan territory, what kind of language should we not be entitled to use in regard to Russian encroachments in Manchuria, Turkestan, and Persia?" The one people who regarded the whole advance with unconcealed derision and contempt were the one people whom it really concerned —the Tibetans.

Past experience was no doubt largely responsible for the arrogant demeanour of Tibet, but there was another reason too, and that was their reliance upon another Power. Whatever the attitude of Russian diplomatists at St Petersburg and London, there is no room for doubt that the Russian agent Dorjieff at Lhassa had given, and continued to give, promises of Russian aid. Colonel Younghusband, in whose experienced hands the conduct of the mission had been placed, received information from various independent sources that the Tibetans were relying on Russian aid, and that Russian arms had been introduced into Tibet. The Chinese official, Colonel Chao, himself complained of the Tibetans having openly taunted the suzerain Power, and proclaimed their reliance upon a stronger and greater nation; and in January of the present year the emissaries from Lhassa themselves informed the British

mission that in the event of an advance and the defeat of the Tibetans they would fall back on another Power, and that things would then be bad for Great Britain.[1]

With the opening months of the present year (1904) it became clear that the Lama hierarchy, headed by the Dalai-Lama, had decided to act independently of Chinese interference, and were determined to oppose *vi et armis* the farther advance of the mission, the first material expression of this determination being the armed opposition to the advance at Guru on March 31, a short time after a body of lamas of high rank from Lhassa had solemnly cursed the mission camp for a period of five consecutive days!

Early in April the mission proceeded to Gyangtse, which was occupied after a sharp encounter, in the course of which the Tibetans sustained further heavy losses, and here a halt was made until July 6, when the great *jong*, which frowns down upon the low, white, two-storeyed houses of the town from its 600 feet of massive isolated rock—"a Corfe Castle of ten times the size, on a hill ten times as high"—was gallantly stormed by General Macdonald's mixed force of Fusiliers, Sikhs, Gurkhas, and Pathans.

The three months' halt at Gyangtse might, no doubt, appear to the impartial observer to be a wholly superfluous waste of time, but in coming to such a conclusion

[1] According to the special correspondent of 'The Times,' Dorjieff, on his return to Tibet after his first mission to Russia in 1898, was the bearer of a large number of valuable presents to the Dalai-Lama, whose influence he was determined to secure in the interests of Russia. "Not the least remarkable argument," writes the correspondent, "he brought forward to effect a *rapprochement* between his two masters was the insidious plea that if the Dalai-Lama would but consent to visit St Petersburg, he would not only secure for Tibet the valuable alliance and protection of Russia, but might even convert to Buddhism the Tsar's wavering faith in Christianity!" —'Times,' May 24, 1904.

he would be guilty of ignoring the extraordinary appreciation on the part of Great Britain of the "majesty of custom"! At the end of each fresh move it is our custom to ignore all that has happened in the interim, and to return to our original starting-point; so having reached Gyangtse, we sent a polite invitation to the Tibetans to negotiate, as if nothing had ever happened! June 25 was fixed as the date up to which delegates would be received as peace-bearers, and to June 25, and indeed for some days longer,—for we gave them a few extra days' grace,—the mission patiently waited, while the Tibetans, whose peaceful envoys it was awaiting, directed a continual storm of bullets and shell upon it from the commanding position of the *jong!* And there are those in England itself who would accuse us of wantonly provoking hostilities!

But custom had been obeyed in another respect; for, according to precedent, the operations were commenced with a force that was wholly inadequate to complete them, so that while the mission was awaiting the peace envoys from Lhassa, it was also awaiting reinforcements from India! The reinforcements duly arrived, as did also the envoys, though the latter were a few days behind their time. This slight lack of punctuality might have been disregarded had they proved competent plenipotentiaries, but once more were the representatives of Great Britain befooled; and since little material progress towards a satisfactory settlement was effected by the religious reflections on the situation which formed the gist of the Dalai-Lama's latest despatch, nothing remained but to begin the advance to Lhassa.

This was actually done on July 14, the peaceful intentions of Great Britain, and the desire of the Government to give to Tibet a further opportunity

of coming to a reasonable settlement,[1] being made known to the people through an official proclamation issued by Colonel Younghusband; and it is more than probable that before these pages appear in print a British force will have torn aside the anomalous curtain of mystery that has for so long enveloped the sacred city of Lhassa.

In reviewing the developments in this quarter in recent years, it must be admitted that the Indian Government did not fail to grasp the full meaning of the question, and having done so, were not slow to make up their minds as to the procedure which they considered necessary. In January 1903 they earnestly urged that a British mission should be despatched to Lhassa, there to conclude a definite treaty signed by both Chinese and Tibetan officials, and they expressed the opinion that such action should culminate in the appointment of a permanent British representative, consular or diplomatic, to reside at the capital.

It was no desire for political or territorial aggrandisement that prompted such counsels, but rather the clearly recognised necessity for protecting our undoubted interests, and for rendering abortive any future endeavour—only too clearly foreseen—by any other Power to secure vested interests in the vicinity of the Indian frontier, which would undoubtedly become sooner or later a grave menace to the security of our Indian Empire. The vital importance which they attached to their views was emphasised by their

[1] "The nature of the terms to be exacted will greatly depend on the attitude of the Tibetan Government, to whom further opportunity of a reasonable settlement of the matter in dispute will be offered."—Extract from the proclamation issued by Colonel Younghusband on July 13, 1904.

repeated pressure of them upon the British Government during the period in which that body was passing through an unaccountable phase of vacillation, and it is a matter for congratulation that the progress of events has rendered the carrying out of their policy, in part at least, probable. It is to be hoped that a treaty recognised and agreed to by all parties will eventually be concluded at the Tibetan capital, and that a permanent British representative will ere long be acknowledged at Lhassa. For it is, as the Government of India so tersely put it, "the most extraordinary anachronism of the twentieth century that there should exist within 300 miles of the borders of British India a State and a Government with whom political relations do not so much as exist, and with whom it is impossible to exchange a written communication."

Exactly how a practical solution of the Tibetan difficulty is to be brought about with a minimum of friction, is of course a question which can best be solved by those on the spot. An interesting suggestion has, however, recently (May 1904) been put forward by a writer in 'The Contemporary Review.'[1] The course therein advocated is the creation of a religious revolution by raising aloft the standard of a Buddhist anti-pope with the goodwill of Great Britain behind him. The whole of the Buddhist world, thinks the writer, except of course the Lhassa council of five, would accept the sudden political intervention of the Tashe-Lama at a moment when the Church was in danger, and with an anglophile Buddhist pope raised to supreme power by British support, Anglo-Tibetan intercourse would be assured, while the star of Great Britain

[1] Alexander Ular.

would be in the ascendant in the heavens of the whole Buddhist world.[1]

The scheme is one of attraction and is worthy of consideration, though it is perhaps open to doubt whether the present Tashe-Lama would prove favourable to foreigners, and if so, whether he could be persuaded to assume the temporal authority of the Dalai-Lama at Lhassa. Spiritually he is the superior of the high priest at the capital, as being the reincarnation of the Dhyani Buddha Amitabha, while the latter is only the reincarnation of the Bodhisat Avalokita; but his spiritual superiority is also due, no doubt, as suggested by Waddell,[2] to his being less contaminated with temporal government and worldly politics. On the other hand, the Tashe-Lama appears in the past to have seen no objection to interesting himself in mundane affairs. Mr Bogle, for instance, the capable envoy of Warren

[1] The so-called double-hierarchy of the Dalai- and Tashe-Lamas originated with the Grand Lama Nag-wan Lo-zan, the sixth in descent from the great reformer and originator of the system of perpetual reincarnation, Geden-dub, who had founded the Tashe-llunpo Monastery in 1445. At his instigation a Mongol prince conquered Tibet in 1640 and presented it to him, together with the title of Dalai-Lama, thus raising him to the high position of priest-king. In this position and title he was confirmed by the Emperor of China on the occasion of a visit to Peking in 1650. It seems, however, that the regency was usually held by a vice-regent called the Gesub Rinpoche, who occupied the position of a temporal sovereign. Early in the eighteenth century the tyranny and oppression of the administration of the vice-regent, Wang Cusho, who was in power at that time, and his intention of becoming independent of China, were reported by the Dalai-Lama to Peking. As a result of this report Wang Cusho was put to death, and the administration placed by the Chinese Emperor in the hands of the Dalai-Lama himself, who has retained an increased temporal power ever since. At the time of Mr Bogle's mission he found the executive administration in the hands of a regent—the then Dalai-Lama being under age—assisted by a council of four other ministers styled *kahlons*. This appears to be the position at Lhassa at the present time, though for the first time for many years the position of regent is occupied by a Dalai-Lama who has been so fortunate as to have lived to attain his majority.

[2] In his 'Buddhism of Tibet.'

Hastings, reports to his chief that—"Although Tashe-Lama is not intrusted with the actual government of the country, yet his authority and influence appear fully equal to accomplish the views which you entertain in regard to the encouragement of trade. His passports to merchants and travellers are obeyed universally throughout Tibet."[1]

However that may be, and whatever be the details of any future settlement, Russia has no legitimate grounds whatsoever for interference. The deference which British statesmen have always seemed to find it incumbent on them to pay to Russian susceptibilities constitutes one of the most egregious traditions of the British Foreign Office. When Russia embarked upon a policy of wholesale annexation, and absorbed territory after territory in Central Asia, she did not deem it either expedient or necessary to consult the wishes or the feelings of Great Britain, nor am I aware that she considered it necessary to obtain the permission of this country prior to concluding the treaty of Bokhara of 1873. Should Russia feel obliged to raise objections to the appointment at any future time of an English representative at the capital of Tibet, she might with advantage be asked to rehearse article xvi. of the said treaty, which presents a striking analogy: "The Russian Government may in like manner have a permanent representative in Bokhara, who shall be near the person of his Eminence the Amir." There is very little likelihood of our ever finding it necessary or desirable to demand from Tibet a fraction of the concessions that Russia upon that occasion demanded and secured from Bokhara; but even if we did, it is difficult to see how, with the words of that treaty before her, she could manufacture any logical objection to our doing so.

[1] See Markham's 'Tibet.'

The question of Tibet must be settled between Great Britain and that country, without reference to any exterior Power. And in a policy such as the declared policy of the Indian Government, which is a policy not of aggrandisement or aggression, but directed solely towards the consolidation and protection of our lawful interests, they may rest assured that they have the support and confidence of the British people.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FAR EAST.

Commerce of the Far East—Great Britain's ideal 'the open door'—Russia's first mouthful of Manchurian territory—The second phase of the Manchurian question—Events following upon the conclusion of the treaty of Shimonoseki—England's isolation—Action of Russia, Germany, and France—The Port Arthur incident—British ignorance of Far Eastern conditions and affairs—The Intelligence Department—The duty of British statesmen to stay the disintegration of the Chinese Empire.

THE Chinese question, like the Chinese Empire and its population, is a large one, and to write of it in all its bearings would require many pages. All that I aspire to do here is to touch upon certain phases which Far Eastern events have of late years assumed, and in doing so I shall keep mainly to those parts of the empire with which the journey, the description of which forms the foundation of this book, happened to bring me in contact.

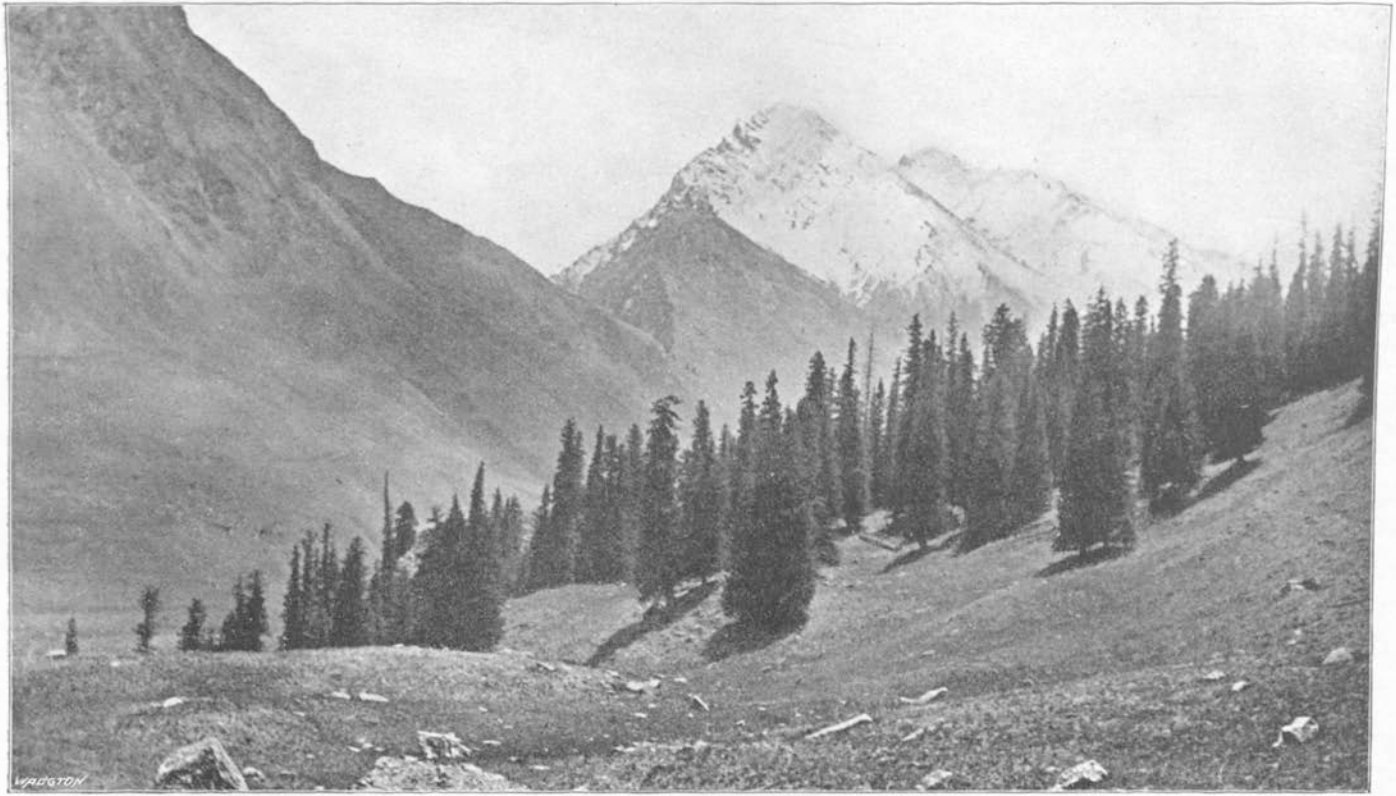
Commerce, as I have already pointed out, is the lever which has raised China to its present unenviable prominence in world politics, and commerce it is that must continue to be the will-o'-the-wisp to draw Western Powers on through the labyrinthine pathways of diplomatic mazes in the remote East—for commerce, large as it already is, must inevitably continue to expand and further

increase, though not perhaps to the extent that the mere abstract expression "400,000,000 of consumers" might not unnaturally suggest. It is not perhaps sufficiently recognised when talking of the commercial possibilities of China that, as Sir Robert Hart puts it, "China needs neither import nor export, and can do without foreign intercourse, . . . and foreign traders can only hope to dispose of their merchandise there in proportion to the new tastes they introduce, the new wants they create, and the care they take to supply what the demand really means." [1]

Still, commerce always did, and always will lie at the root of the Chinese question, though not so exclusively perhaps in the future as in the past. For a desire among European nations to secure each for itself as large a share of the trade as possible, has led to not always amicable contact among them, and to an unfortunate failure on the part of some of them, as far as China itself is concerned, to make any accurate distinction between *meum* and *tuum*. Moreover, reservations must be made in this, as in other generalities, more especially in this instance in the case of Russia and Japan, the former of which has been largely influenced in her Far Eastern progress by her innate craving for access to a warm-water sea, and the latter by the necessity, owing to her geographical position and the encroachment of the former, of securing the safety of her empire.

Great Britain's ideal in the Far East, as elsewhere, can be summed up in the words, "the open door." There are many other terms by which it has been expressed, such as "integrity," or "a fair field

[1] These from the Land of Sinim.



VIEW IN THE THIAN SHAN, WESTERN CHINA.

and no favour"; but this variety of nomenclature in no way affects the guiding principle, and it must be admitted that this ideal has from first to last remained constant, however inconsistent the methods by which it has been sought from time to time to secure it. Other Powers that neither enjoyed the same start that British enterprise gave to British merchants in China, nor possess the same commercial aptitude, entertain no such admiration for the policy of the open door, and therein is to be found one of the factors which are always threatening to create a destructive upheaval of the Chinese volcano. The other is the innate, indestructible, and illimitable hatred of the Chinese themselves for every one and every thing that is not of their own race.

One of the greatest blows that have as yet been struck at the integrity of China, and *de facto* at the British ideal, is the absorption of Manchuria; and as it is only Northern China, if I except the extreme western limits of that empire, that I have any personal acquaintance with, Manchuria is the core round which I weave my tale.

The first mouthful of Manchurian territory which Russia swallowed was bitten off in the 'Fifties, when the indefatigable Muravieff was pushing his activity down the Amur river. The treaty of Aigun, concluded in 1858, corrected some of the mistakes made by Golovin in 1689, and a further treaty concluded at Peking in 1860 gave diplomatic sanction to the already effected occupation of Possiet Bay, by ceding to Russia the whole of the coast-line of Manchuria as far as the borders of Korea. The victorious armies of England and France were in occupation of Peking, and the nightmare of a prolonged Euro-

pean occupation hung heavily upon the minds of Chinese statesmen, when a friend in need appeared upon the scene. General Ignatieff, who, of course, saw that the occupation could be only temporary, likewise saw that the Chinese understanding was so unhinged with terror as not to be able to grasp so obvious a fact for itself, and was not slow to take advantage of this aberration. Russia had always entertained feelings of deep friendship for China, she would now give tangible proof of her kindly feeling, she would induce the allies to withdraw. So ran the tenor of his tale. Grateful China, or rather China as represented by Prince Kung, fell at her benefactor's feet. What could she do to repay such kindness? The General thought that a slight readjustment of the Russo-Chinese frontier might be accepted as a token of Chinese gratitude, and the treaty of Peking was signed. Of course the allies withdrew, equally of course their withdrawal had nothing to do with the Russian envoy.

So ended the first phase of the Manchurian question. The second phase opened amid the clash of arms, and the country that had slumbered in obscurity for thirty years was displayed to the Powers of the West under the lurid light of war. A new star had ascended in the Eastern sky, and henceforth Japan became a Power to be reckoned with in the councils of the East.

The cause of the Chino-Japan war of 1894 has never been disclosed. "To defeat China" appears to be the only definite reason that has ever been assigned, though the moral right of one Power to make war on another for the mere pleasure of defeating it would seem to be, to say the least of it, questionable. The probability is that Japan was blessed with far-seeing statesmen, who foresaw the likelihood of a powerful rival some day

raising up hostile influences in territory unpleasantly close to their island empire, and, realising with unerring intuition the menace to their security, determined to be first in the field. They had doubtless watched with interest the invariable outcome of diplomatic encounters between British and Russian statesmen in Asia in the past, and were consequently able to gauge at its correct value the pledge given to Great Britain by Russia in 1886, that she would not occupy Korean territory "under any circumstances whatever." Be that as it may, war was waged with a success that elicited a chorus of approbation from the European press; the pretensions of China to be regarded as an entity in the comity of nations were rudely shattered, and a treaty was signed, which among other things gave over to Japan that part of Manchuria which is known as the Liao-tung Peninsula.

The proceedings which immediately followed upon the conclusion of the treaty of Shimonoseki are only too well known. Japan in possession of the southern coast of Manchuria was inimical to Russian aspirations. The object of years of patient toil and persevering diplomacy was thereby frustrated, and Japan's enjoyment of territorial acquisition was doomed to be short-lived. It is generally admitted that Li Hung Chang proceeded to Shimonoseki with the comforting knowledge that the more grasping the demands of the victor, the more certain was the prospect of European intervention. And so he signed away integral portions of the Chinese Empire with unabashed complacency. Nor was he disappointed at the sequel. With the co-operation of Germany and France, Russia addressed Japan in April 1895 as follows :—

"The Imperial Russian Government, having examined the terms of peace demanded of China by

Japan, consider that the contemplated possession of the Liao-tung Peninsula by Japan will not only constitute a constant menace to the capital of China, but will also render the independence of Korea illusory, and thus jeopardise the permanent peace of the Far East. Accordingly, the Imperial Government, in a spirit of cordial friendship for Japan, hereby counsel the Government of the Emperor of Japan to renounce the definitive possession of the Liao-tung Peninsula."

The result of this note, which practically amounted to an ultimatum, could never be in doubt. Japan was at the time in no position to defy three first-class Powers, and since England stood aside in self-laudatory isolation, nothing remained to be done but to obey. Her endeavour to obtain a pledge from China that the territories she was evacuating should never be ceded to another Power was unavailing, Russia professing an injured resentment at such an imputation upon her disinterestedness.

It has been the practice with a certain section of English politicians to extol the policy of masterly inactivity of the Rosebery Cabinet upon this occasion. Nevertheless there is no doubt whatsoever that therein lay the first of a series of extraordinary blunders which characterised British policy in China during the immediately succeeding years. British interference could only have been directed towards emphasising the demand of Japanese statesmen for a guarantee that the Liao-tung Peninsula should not be alienated in the future, a pledge which would have rendered the subsequent proceedings of Russia indefensible. Moreover, whatever paroxysms of delight our voluntary isolation may have excited in the breasts of the Rosebery following, our immediately resulting involuntary isolation in affairs Chinese when the claims of the three protesting nations

had to be settled, and might, beneath whose brutal sway treaties and agreements were scattered as chaff before the wind, became sole arbiter, was nothing less than disastrous to British commerce and prestige.

France opened the ball by extracting China's signature to a treaty the provisions of which were in direct contravention to those of an already existing agreement between England and China; but England was now a negligible quantity as compared with the Russo-Franco-German combination, and could be, and in fact was, ignored.

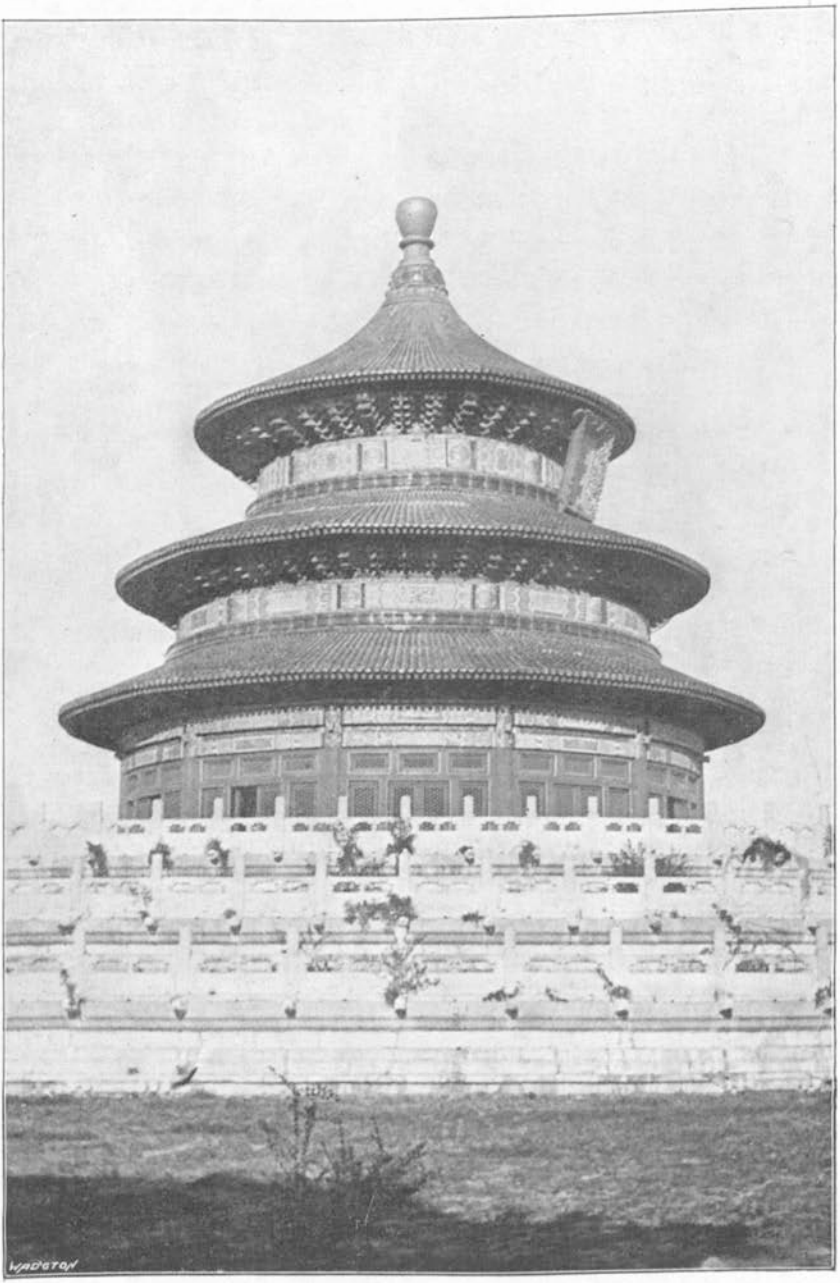
Russia lost little time in making her presence felt. A loan for £16,000,000, arranged for between China and English capitalists, was peremptorily vetoed, and the Chinese compelled to borrow from France,—Russia herself, without any such request having been made by China, standing security for the solvency of that country; and in 1896 she concluded an agreement which prepared the way for carrying out her ambitious programme of conquest by railway in Manchuria. The acquisition of the warm-water port which was to constitute the terminus of the railway was facilitated by the high-handed action of Germany in seizing the harbour of Kiao Chau, and in exacting official sanction for her occupation of the Shan-tung Promontory after she had done so, as well as by the extraordinary procedure of British statesmen at this critical period.

The dramatic proceedings in connection with the Port Arthur incident are of such recent occurrence, and are so well known to all who have interested themselves in Far Eastern affairs, as to make anything more than a brief summary unnecessary. The first act opens with a soliloquy by a British Cabinet Minister, gratuitously informing the British public, in an audible aside, that "so far from regarding with fear and jealousy a com-

mercial outlet for Russia in the Pacific," he would "welcome such a result as a distinct advance in this far-distant region."[1] Russian statesmen were naturally astounded at so unexpected an invitation; and having been given an inch, they were not slow to take the proverbial ell. In December 1897 the Russian fleet received permission to winter at Port Arthur, the importance of which move seems to have been fully appreciated by the British Minister at Peking, for on being consulted by the British Government as to what they should demand from China in return for the advance of a British loan, he promptly replied, the opening of Talienwan as a treaty port. But Russia was pursuing a determined and definite policy, and unconditionally opposed such a step. No doubt Russian statesmen saw in England's demand for the opening of Talienwan a distinct breach of faith when viewed in the light of the unfortunate declaration of 1896; and it is difficult to see under the circumstances any flaw in the Russian Ambassador's statement to Lord Salisbury, "that it was generally admitted that Russia might claim a commercial *débouché* upon the open sea, and in order to enjoy that advantage fully she ought to be at liberty to make such arrangements with China as she could obtain with respect to the commercial *régime* which was to prevail there."[2] Since British statesmen had declared that the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1886 concerning Korea was still binding, what other port but Talienwan could she secure as the offered "commercial outlet"? Needless to say Talienwan remained closed.

But this decline of British influence at Peking before the increased prestige of Russia was not the only humiliation that overtook Great Britain in the gloomy days

[1] Mr Balfour at Bristol, February 3, 1896.
[2] January 19, 1898.



THE TEMPLE OF HEAVEN, PEKING.

of the January of 1898. The presence of a British vessel, H.M.S. *Iphigenia*, which was visiting Port Arthur, as it had every right to do under the treaty of Tientsin, was objected to by the Russian authorities, who made representations to the British Government to this effect. While pointing out to the Russian Ambassador that British ships had every right to be there, Lord Salisbury issued no orders to prevent them leaving, with a result that as soon as the *Iphigenia* left the port, a Reuter's telegram was published in Peking, stating that it was officially announced at St Petersburg that British men-of-war had received orders to quit Port Arthur immediately in consequence of representations made by Russia. The effect of this report may be well imagined.

In reply to these unfortunate occurrences on the Pacific, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs stated in the House of Commons in February that "the right to send ships of war to Port Arthur was a right which we enjoyed together with other Powers under the treaty of Tientsin, and, when occasion arose, we should do it again." Unfortunately the occasion never did arise, nor did we do it again; for in March Russia forced from China a lease of both Talienwan and Port Arthur, and included in the convention connected with it an article which reads as follows: "The two nations agree that Port Arthur shall be a naval port for the sole use of Russian and Chinese men-of-war, and be considered as an unopened port so far as the naval and mercantile vessels of other nations are concerned."

Thus did we stand idly by and view our treaty rights played fast and loose with, in spite of the heroic statement by the Prime Minister—that there was no effort which this country would not make rather than allow its rights to be destroyed! No wonder that a Russian

official was led in his jubilation to exclaim, "We knew very well that England would solemnly protest, but we also knew as well that she would also solemnly do nothing," or that the same individual candidly confessed that that was the reason why, "from the day of her last statesman Disraeli until now, we have not counted, and do not count, on real opposition from England."

Russia was of course accused of bad faith, and rightly too, when it was discovered that Port Arthur was to be a closed port. But Russian aims were made perfectly clear—if indeed they had not been long before—by the statement of Count Muravieff to Sir Nicholas O'Conor on March 13, that he had received the Emperor's orders to tell him that "Talienwan would be open to foreign trade, but that his Imperial Majesty had told him at the same time that Port Arthur would be regarded strictly as a military port." Under stress of British importunity it became necessary that this clear language should be modified, pending negotiations for the acquisition of the ports in question, and on March 15 the British ambassador was informed that "both Port Arthur and Talienwan would be open to foreign trade." Article vi. of the convention already quoted is of course in direct contravention of these assurances; but surely British statesmen should have been sufficiently well acquainted with Russian diplomatic methods by this time to realise that Count Muravieff would find little difficulty in asserting—as in fact he did—that "the ideas" which he had expressed "very confidentially" on March 16, with regard to the proposed lease of Port Arthur and Talienwan, "ought never to have been interpreted as *assurances*, and could not in reality have had such a significance."

It is natural to seek for some explanation of the extraordinary vagaries of British diplomacy at this

period, and there can be little doubt that it was in great measure due to ignorance of Far Eastern conditions and affairs. Lack of information had led to the policy of passive spectatorship at the time of the Chino-Japan complications of 1895, and a complete failure to grasp the real objects of Russian desire, or to appreciate the modifying effect which certain incidents—such as the German seizure of Kiao Chau—had upon the mode of procedure employed by her in obtaining them, can alone have been responsible for the succeeding period of ineptitude. The British Intelligence Department in the Far East, or rather the lack of it, is absolutely astounding. There was a story current when I was in those parts of how, when the extension on the mainland opposite Hongkong was ceded to Great Britain in 1898, the military authorities, being ignorant of the lie of the land, called in the aid of some Hongkong sportsmen who were in the habit of indulging, by way of recreation, in an occasional afternoon's snipe-shooting. Yet it is on record that the said authorities displayed considerable annoyance, if not indeed indignation, when they found themselves floundering in a snipe-bog!

It has been suggested, with a view to increasing our official knowledge of China, that intelligence departments, with a head officer in charge in each case, should be created at Hongkong or Canton, at Shanghai, and at Tientsin, a third of the country being assigned to each body; but, as far as I know, there is at the present time only one, at Tientsin. It is only fair to state that, in light of the revelations of the recent War Commission, it would appear that the intelligence branch itself is not to be blamed for its inefficiency. There is much that is significant in Sir John Ardagh's reply to question 5011 of the official report issued upon the inquiry into

the conduct of the war: "I put forward an official application to the War Office, but it received so much cold water from the financial point of view that it came to nothing. The end of my proposal of £18,000 a-year for ten years was an offer of £100!"[1]

The events of 1895-1898, however, cast an illuminating light upon the ambitions of certain Powers, and it became impossible to refuse to recognise the serious nature of the process of decomposition which had set in. To stay the collapse of the Chinese Empire, as they were endeavouring to stay the collapse of more than one oriental monarchy in other parts of Asia, became the manifest duty of British statesmen—a task in which, as will be seen, they have found ready coadjutors in the Government of Japan. Events had proceeded too far to admit of any rapid reversal in the process, and the proceedings, which have finally culminated in the present Far Eastern cataclysm, were spread over a number of years, to a brief account of which I shall devote the pages of another chapter.

[1] It must be admitted that private enterprise stands out in strong contrast to official *insouciance*, and it speaks volumes for the mettle of individuals that they are willing to secure information of value to their country even at the risk of official displeasure. Here is a case in point. A young officer keenly interested in the advancement of his country gave up his leave to making valuable surveys of certain parts of China. In order to complete them he outstayed his leave by a few days, and on his return, after successfully accomplishing his object, he received his reward. "Official thanks for his trouble and valuable information," I hazarded when I was first told the story. "Nothing of the sort," was the reply. "What then?" I asked. "A fine for missing two or three days' regimental duty!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FAR EAST—*continued.*

The British awakening at Peking—The present value of Wei-hai-Wei—Germany at Kiao Chau—The reform movement—A dramatic *coup d'état*—The Boxer outbreak of 1900—A colossal scheme of regeneration—Russia's demands as the price of the evacuation of Manchuria—The Manchurian Convention of 1902—Manchuria seen once more under the searching light of war—Points to be borne in mind in weighing the chances of Russia and Japan—Russian lack of organisation—Official corruption—Capabilities of the Siberian railway—The Russian army—The soldiers of the Mikado—*Bushido*—The patriotism of the people—Victory in the field likely to attend the Japanese forces—The fate of Russia rests with the Russian *people.*

IF the year 1898 was remarkable for the bold execution of Russian designs, it was also made memorable by two other events—the awakening of British statesmen from their inexplicable dream, and the amazing attempt of the Emperor Kwang Hsü at reform! A glimmering perception of the real goal towards which events in the Far East were rapidly drifting seems to have at length cast a ray of light across the darkness of the British mind. Strong representations were made at Peking, and various concessions secured in the opening days of the year, among which were a declaration on the part of the Tsungli-Yamen that territory in the Yang-tse region should not be mortgaged, leased, or ceded to another Power, and a promise that as long as British trade preponderated over that of any other Power, the

post of Inspector-General of Customs should be held by an Englishman; while Lord Salisbury, bearing in mind no doubt the Bristol speech of 1896, declared in March that whereas his Government had always looked with favour upon the idea of Russia obtaining an ice-free port on the Pacific, "Russia had now given a most unfortunate extension to this policy." The tangible proof of the official awakening was the acquisition of Wei-hai-wei for such period as Russia occupied Port Arthur, and this was followed nearly four years later by the Anglo-Japanese alliance, contracted at a time when Russia was endeavouring to extort a brand-new set of absolutely preposterous concessions from China as the price of her evacuation of Manchuria—a tardy recognition of the dismal failure of the policy of isolation of 1895.

The value of Wei-hai-wei[1] is, as I have had occasion to remark in a previous chapter, under existing circumstances hypothetical. It is hardly conceivable that in the event of Great Britain going to war, any British captain would consent to allow his ship to remain in an open harbour where it could at any moment be torpedoed, or that anything else could be done with the coal-supply now kept on the island in the harbour-mouth than to shift it precipitately into the sea. When in the hands of China, it was fortified at a cost of from £5,000,000 to £6,000,000, and no doubt thoroughly to refortify the island and the mainland now

[1] The harbour of Wei-hai-wei, which is said to be capable of holding from thirty to forty men-of-war,—though I believe sixteen is the largest number that we have ever had in the harbour at one time,—is faced by an island, which divides the entrance into two channels. The narrow entrance is from 1200 to 1400 yards in width, and the broader channel from 2 to 3 miles, and shallow for the greater part. To render the harbour secure from torpedo attack it would be necessary to construct a breakwater across this passage, at a probable cost of £1,000,000.

THE ANGLO-CHINESE REGIMENT AT WEI-HAI-WEI.

would entail a very large expenditure, and would necessitate the presence of a number of troops, variously estimated at from 3000 to 10,000 men. I do not pretend to decide between the experts who are in favour of or opposed to the fortifying of the port; but even the disciples of the latter policy appear to admit that a few guns might be of advantage, as witness the words of "Navalis" in 'The Times': "No one doubts certain ports require a few efficient guns, but anything more than this is a culpable waste of the national resources." But where are the guns at Wei-hai-wei? As I have already pointed out, Wei-hai-wei presents to the astonished gaze the sublimely ridiculous spectacle of five new and scientifically built forts, which cannot boast of so much as a pop-gun between them![1] And while we are spending a modest annual sum of perhaps £20,000 a-year on military and civil administration combined,[2] Germany, just round the corner at Kiao Chau, is constructing a harbour at a cost of £1,000,000, and is willingly spending on her acquisition at the rate of £600,000 a-year!

The movement of reform was as astonishing as it was transient. On January 17, 1898, was issued an imperial edict which placed it on record, among much else, that "the question of the present day is that we begin in reforming ourselves, and diligently reorganise our defences." Once started, edict followed edict with bewildering rapidity, all overflowing with the expression

[1] Vice-Admiral C. C. Penrose Fitz-Gerald writes: "Had Wei-hai-wei been given the modest fortifications which were decided upon three years ago, not even Rehoboam in a gunboat would have had the temerity to attack it, and, even if he had, it would probably have held out until the squadron returned to relieve it."—'Times,' March 31, 1904.

[2] A colonial grant of £9000 a-year is allowed for civil administration on the mainland, while the cost of the 500 men to which the original Anglo-Chinese regiment has been reduced probably amounts to £10,000 or £12,000. The island is given over to the Admiralty.

of the imperial desire for reform. "If we wish to make ourselves strong once more, there is no other way than to cast away from us the old *régime* and inaugurate a modern one," or again, "China's weakness really lies in her lazy officials and the deep-rootedness of all ancient vices," are but instances of the admirable tenor of the imperial decrees.

But if these edicts sounded like glad tidings of great joy to the amazed onlookers from the West, there was one near by upon whose ears they fell with all the jarring force of a harsh cacophony. And that one waited but her time to strike. On September 21 came the dramatic *coup d'état* by which the reformer was relegated to the poisoned influences of forced seclusion behind the prison bars of the hareem, and the Dowager-Empress Tze-hsi-tuan-yu emerged once more as the *dea ex machina* to guide her erring Government back along the dark pathway of reaction. The young shoots of incipient reform were rudely crushed beneath the reign of terror that immediately ensued, while a paralysed world looked on appalled. Six of the ministers most closely connected with the movement of reform were led out to execution by the notorious Kang Yi, who marched triumphantly into the court of *justice* where it was supposed the prisoners were to be tried, and hilariously read out the *sacred* contents of a decree which doomed them to instant death. There was nothing more to be said, and decapitation followed without further loss of time. Reform was at an end and reaction in full swing.[1]

[1] The decree of September 21, 1898, framed by the Dowager-Empress to acquaint the people with the abdication of the Emperor, is worthy of reproduction: "Our empire is now labouring under great difficulties, and therefore it is necessary to delay the question of ordinary reforms. We have worked energetically and laboriously at our duty, day and night, so that after attending closely to a myriad of matters we have often felt much

The next violent upheaval of the Chinese volcano took the shape of the Boxer rising and siege of the legations at Peking, and it was not until an international force had dispelled the dark cloud of obscurity which enveloped the victims of the troubles of 1900 that reform again became a subject of discussion. There is evidence of some slight improvement in the internal condition of the country in the past two years, and the Peking correspondent of 'The Times,' while admitting that "the Wai-wu-pu is the same cumbrous body as was the Tsungli-Yamen, the only change being a reduction of the number of ministers and an alteration of the shape of the table at which they sit," affirms that the internal condition of the country is unquestionably better in 1904 than it was at the beginning of 1903.

There is little, however, to suggest that the colossal scheme of financial and military reorganisation which has recently been propounded by Sir Robert Hart has any great prospects of fulfilment. Sir Robert Hart is, as I well know, a staunch believer in the future regeneration of China;* but can even the sturdiest believer in the latent possibilities of the Chinese re-

lassitude in body. This brought us to the thought that her Majesty, the Empress-Dowager Tze-hsi-tuan-yu, &c., had since the reign of the late Emperor Tung Chih twice held the regency with much success, and that although the empire was then also labouring under great difficulties she always issued triumphant and successful when grappling with critical questions. Now we consider the safety of the empire handed down to us by our imperial ancestors above all things else; hence under the critical condition of things now pending over us we have thrice petitioned her Majesty to graciously accede to our prayer and personally give us the benefit of her wise instructions in the government of this empire. She has, fortunately for the prosperity of the officials and inhabitants of the empire, granted our request, and from to-day on her Majesty will conduct the affairs of State in the ordinary throne-hall." This and the other reform edicts of the Emperor Kwang Hsü have been reprinted in pamphlet form from 'The North China Daily News.'

gard as anything but chimerical a measure of reform which is in the course of a few years to give to China an increased annual revenue of £40,000,000, a fleet consisting of 30 battleships and first-class cruisers, 30 second-class cruisers and as many destroyers, with a flotilla of 150 torpedo-boats, three naval and four military colleges, four arsenals, an up-to-date army of 500,000 on a peace footing, and last, but not least, a new and incorruptible set of officials! *Omnia vincit labor improbus!* But are the difficulties which await Sir Robert Hart likely to prove less insurmountable than those that attended the shades of the daughters of Danaus? The task might well recall the unavailing endeavour of a Sisyphus—

> "One—but the type of all—
> Rolling the dreadful ball
> *In vain! in vain!*"[1]

The Boxer rising of 1900, as all the world knows, afforded Russia the excuse for which she was waiting to complete the process of absorption inaugurated by Muravieff and Ignatieff in the 'Fifties. Had there been no Boxer outbreak it would have made no difference, for it is in no way open to doubt that when Russia spent a fortune on Manchuria and built a railway from one end of it to the other she did so with the fixed conviction that that country was destined to be hers. "Is it really possible," asks the 'Pre-Amur Viedomosti,' "that the Americans imagine that Russia has spent so much treasure and blood on Manchuria simply in order to convert it into an international bazaar? Do American editors really seriously imagine that Russian officers who have traversed Manchuria through and through in peril

[1] Charles Mackay.

THE WHARF AT TIENTSIN.

and suffering, constructing the railway and defending it from hordes of Boxers; that the Russian Cossacks and soldiers who have performed miracles of valour in the last Chinese war—modestly termed troubles—have suffered all this, and fallen on the field of battle, for the sake of foreign commercial firms? It was not for this that Russia has done what she has. In one word, we have fought and laboured in Manchuria *not* for the sake of open doors." And so the Manchurian phase of 1900-1904, displaying Russia in occupation of the field, was the natural corollary of those that had already been enacted.

Russian statesmen no doubt realised that at the conclusion of the Boxer troubles they might be obliged under external pressure to effect a partial and temporary evacuation of the country; and bearing this in mind, they were not slow to determine that such evacuation, if it became necessary, should be made the lever for securing important and valuable concessions. Hence the many troublesome documents which disturbed the peace of the inmates of more than one chancellory from the opening days of 1901 until the early part of 1902, when the publication of the Anglo-Japanese treaty was instrumental in hastening on the conclusion in March of that year of a more or less satisfactory convention for the evacuation of Manchuria.

The demands formulated in the previous documents are of considerable interest, as showing the wide scope of Russian aspirations. The chief provisions were to have been as follows: (1) An increase in the number of troops originally granted for the protection of the railway; (2) the numbers of any future Chinese army to be fixed in consultation with Russia; (3) no subject of another Power to be employed to train naval or military

forces in the northern provinces; (4) without Russia's consent no mining, railway, or other privileges to be conceded to the subjects of another Power in Manchuria, Mongolia, Tarbagatai, Ili, Kashgar, Yarkand, or Khoten, and China herself not to construct a railway in those provinces without Russia's consent; (5) indemnities due to Russia to be set off, if desirable, against privileges of other kinds; and (6) Russia to have the right to build a railway to the Great Wall in the direction of Peking.

The convention, eventually concluded in March, was a vast improvement on previous propositions, and though there were several points which were not deemed completely satisfactory in this country, Lord Lansdowne informed the Russian Ambassador that he "did not desire to examine these provisions too microscopically," and hoped that "the Agreement would be loyally and considerately interpreted on both sides."

But if the convention signed in March 1902 was more or less satisfactory to other interested Powers, it was very far from being so to Russia; and there can be very little doubt that when she signed it, under pressure of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, she did so with the mental reservation that she in no way considered herself bound by it. Inconvenient pressure was thereby temporarily removed, and she was content to await what the future would bring forth. Those, therefore, who had all along clearly foreseen what was the real object of Russian desire were no doubt fully prepared for the delay in the evacuation, and the news, which came a year later, of a further set of Russian demands, and again in September 1903 of similar conditions.

It is unnecessary to enumerate the various subterfuges under cover of which Russia found it possible to postpone the evacuation, and even to reoccupy such portions of the country as had actually been given back.

The old cry of the impotence of the rightful owners to keep order, which has been made use of so often and with so great a degree of success by Russia in her dealings with oriental countries, of course played its share in the game, and, "in consequence of the agitation which prevailed in the district," Russian troops re-entered Mukden in October 1903. This in spite of the fact that as far back as November 1902 Consul Hosie reported that under the recently appointed Chinese Governor-General at Mukden far better order was being maintained than during the Russian occupation, and that "numerous heads exposed on trees along the highways" bore witness to the vigorous measures that were being taken to suppress brigandage!

So the farce dragged on until the audience wearied of the gratuitous repetition of Russian assurances, and even diplomatists were seen to yawn and lose something of their usual urbanity in shaping their replies. "Russia," ran a memorandum communicated by the Russian Ambassador so recently as January 8 of this year, "considers it indispensable to declare from this day forth that she has no intention whatever of placing any obstacle in the way of the continued enjoyment by foreign Powers of the rights acquired by them in virtue of the treaties now in force." In reply to which even so courteous a diplomatist as Lord Lansdowne was unable "to help regretting that Russia should have found it impossible to take even a single step in pursuance of the policy which she had thus prescribed for herself," or to show "some concrete evidence" of her intention to make good her promises.

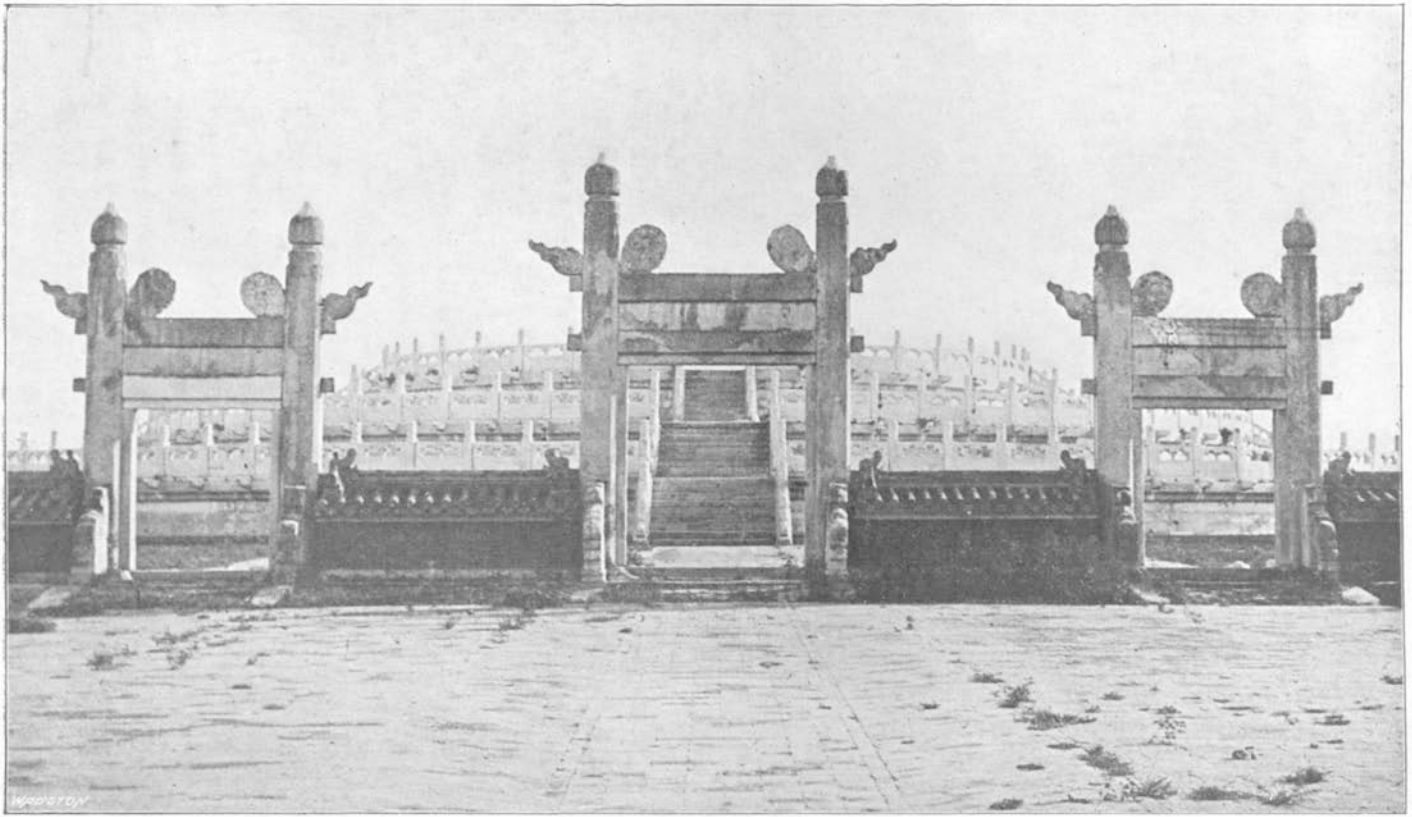
The present phase of the Manchurian question is one which has drawn the awakened curiosity of the world to that hitherto little-considered country, for once more does the searching light of war play upon

the dark corners of the ancient home of the Manchus, and for the second time in the course of a single decade are the mountains and valleys of Shing King reverberating with the stirring strains of martial music, and the deep intonation of the cannon's roar.

Russia bluffed high, and having done so expected to take the pool. That any one would dare to call her hand seems hardly to have occurred to her. Yet it was Russia herself who only nine years before had laid down the circumstances which would constitute a case for war. "The contemplated possession of the Liao-tung Peninsula by Japan will not only constitute a constant menace to the capital of China, but will also render the independence of Korea illusory, and thus *jeopardise the permanent peace of the Far East.*" [1] Fortunately such a catastrophe was at the time averted, thanks to the withdrawal of Japan. In 1904 Russia possessed the Liao-tung Peninsula, and not only did she possess the Liao-tung Peninsula but maintained a military occupation of the whole of the hinterland, and a threatening force the whole length of the borders of Korea. Could it logically be said that the Russian position of 1904 was less likely to "constitute a constant menace to the capital of China, to render illusory the independence of Korea, and thus jeopardise the permanent peace of the Far East," than the Japanese position of 1895? Russian statesmen have short memories when it is convenient for them to forget; but with these little facts recalled to their mind, surely they should be the last people in the world to accuse Japan of making war without ample and reasonable grounds.

Who is going to win? is the question which every-

[1] The Russian representation to Japan in April 1895.



THE ALTAR OF HEAVEN, PEKING.

body is asking everybody else. There are too many unknown quantities to tempt any one to prophesy, and "positiveness in such matters," as Captain Mahan would say, "is the doubtful privilege of the doctrinaire, and commonly unfortunate in the result." There are, however, a few points which, being borne in mind by any one attempting to form a judgment, may be of help in assisting towards arriving at a reasonable conclusion.

There is the extraordinary contempt which was at the outset displayed by Russia for the opposition of Japan. In face of persistent official denial, the fact remains that on the historic Monday night of February 8 (1904), while the ships of Admiral Togo, which were destined to declare the fateful message to the world in their own dramatic way, were stealing up to their sleeping foe, the pleasure-loving Russians, who, in view of the extremely critical state of the relations between the two Powers, should have been sleeping at their post on the ships and in the forts, had betaken themselves wholesale to a gala performance at a circus! For the first serious reverse which they sustained the Russians have mainly themselves to thank.

There are two points which must never be lost sight of when considering the prospects of any Russian military undertaking — absence of organisation, and ingrained official corruption. Those who know Russia well will tell you that Russian organisation is a hideous travesty of the word. To quote a single example of Russian efficiency, Sir Robert Hart, when discussing the merits of the various units of the mixed detachment that succeeded in making its way to Peking immediately prior to the siege of 1900, writes: "As for the Russians, they brought a thou-

sand rounds of shell for their gun and neglected to bring the field-gun itself, which remained at Tientsin —to our great grief afterwards, when it would have been of untold value at Peking!" [1]

Corruption, it is to be feared, is deep-rooted and widespread. "Look to thy office and indemnify thyself" was the perilous advice of the old Russian Tsars, advice which, it must be admitted, was universally acted upon. Peter the Great, it is true, waged unappeasable warfare against this deeply-rooted abuse, and on one occasion condemned an offending governor of Astrakhan "to be torn by pigs!" But how little available were his laudable endeavours may be judged by the fact that Alexander II., when campaigning with his army in Bulgaria during the Russo-Turkish war, is reported to have said that there were only two honest men in the Russian army, and one of those men was Tsar Alexander II. and the other was the heir to his throne! It is only too probable that the stories to the effect that bags of sand masquerade as sacks of flour in many a Russian store, and that cases filled chiefly with shavings and sawdust reach the troops, in place of the offerings made by private charity for their comfort, will prove to have only too solid foundation.

In the case of the present war, the limited possibilities of the Russian communications must also be kept in view. Mr Henry Norman, whose Russian sympathies are well known, admits that "the expectation that the line would serve at a moment of danger, or in pursuit of a suddenly executed *coup*, to throw masses of soldiers from Europe into China, is yet far from realisation. The line," he goes on, "and its organisation would break down utterly under such pressure," and I know of no single instance of any one who has had any practical

[1] These from the Land of Sinim.

acquaintance with the railway having come to any other conclusion. So one of the chief essentials in which the Russian Empire is superior to Japan—that of numbers—is, as long as Japan has command of the sea, to a great extent discounted.

As far as mere material goes, she has little to complain off. In her Cossacks she has a magnificent force of scouts and a mobile body that would constitute a valuable asset in any army. Brave, hardy, intrepid, accustomed to nothing but the most strenuous life, the Cossack is ready at any moment to go anywhere and to undertake any adventure. As to the soldier of the line, to quote Mr Henry Norman once more, "from the point of view of the military martinet he is ideal *kanonen-futter—chair à canon.*" He has, on the other hand, what many will vote a serious defect in modern warfare—a complete lack of intelligence. The Russian soldier of the line is in fact a mere rather dirtily clad machine, who is never under any circumstances expected to be able to think for himself. He will fight with a stolid stubborn persistence because he is ordered to do so, and not for any reason that his own intelligence might suggest. That, however, is not the fault of the material, but of those who have moulded it, though the fact is in no way altered because the responsibility for it rests upon one part of the whole rather than upon the other. It has, moreover, yet to be proved that the Russian military system is capable of producing strategists of a standard necessary to predicate success when pitted against a foe whose plans of campaign are so thoroughly and so systematically devised and so conscientiously and so doggedly carried out as are those of Japan.

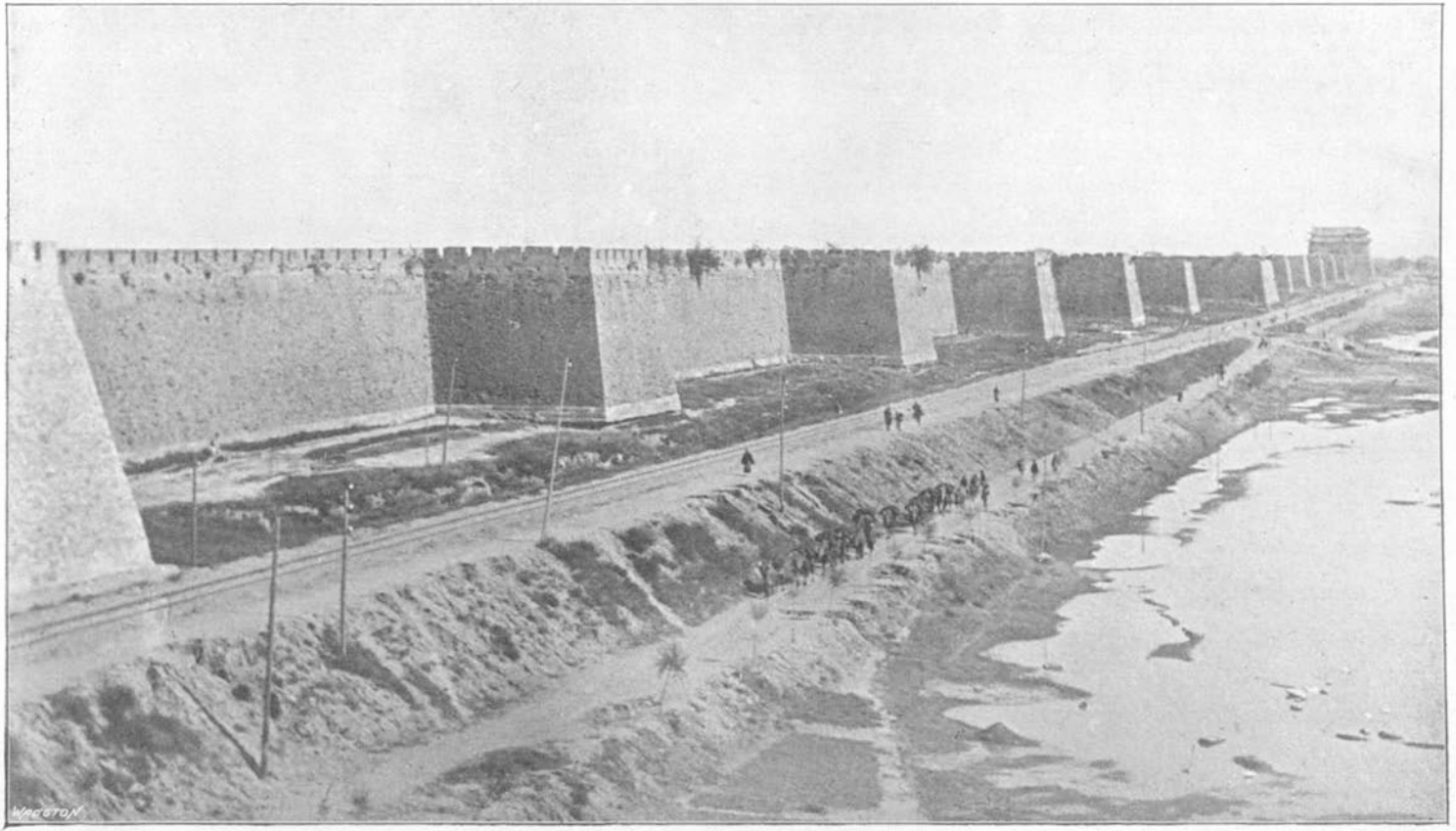
From a brief consideration of such points as I have ventured to call attention to, it will be seen that the

command of the sea once in the hands of Japan—and the mastery of the sea was the first object of Japanese strategists—the prospects of a decisive Russian success were by no means so bright as was too widely supposed. This impression can only be strengthened by a consideration of the forces at the disposal of the island empire.

The calibre of the Japanese fighting power was displayed when her troops came into contact with those of China in 1894, though her real power was perhaps scarcely accurately gauged, since China, which had up to that time been proclaimed a tower of strength, was, on her defeat, dubbed, with easy inconsistency, a negligible foe. The high standard of efficiency which she had then displayed was, however, maintained when she again came within the range of military criticism. "The Japanese contingent," writes Sir Robert Hart, in the same paragraph in which he indulges in his lament over the carelessness of the Russians, "numbered only twenty-five men; but the work they subsequently did, and the way they did it, won everybody's admiration, and would have done honour to five times their number," [1] and the fact that it was that part of the city apportioned to the troops of Japan, when the time came for the pacification of Peking, that was first resettled and restored to order, was by no means lost upon the minds of the observant.

Those indeed who watched carefully the operations of the international force did not hesitate to place the soldiers of the Mikado in the foremost rank, and when those whose duty it is to take note of such things came to interpret what they had seen with the aid supplied by a knowledge of the ethics of the nation, they cannot have failed to realise that there had sprung up

[1] These from the Land of Sinim.



THE WALLS OF PEKING.

within the confines of the newly born empire of the East a force that was capable at any moment of astonishing the world. When one ponders upon the innate contempt for death which must be the birthright of a people accustomed for generations to the strange national institution of *hara-kiri* (self-immolation); upon the martial spirit which has for centuries been the essence of their national existence; and upon the extreme loyalty and love of king and country fostered by the Shintoist belief,—one is bound to realise the potentialities of a force constituted of such material, and welded into shape in accordance with the accepted tenets of the highest modern military science and organisation.

For whatever opinion may be held of the religion of the country, it cannot be doubted that the *bushido*, the "Precepts of Knighthood," the philosophy which became an abiding principle of the fighting caste, and finally of the whole people, has exercised a powerful influence upon the history of Japan, and has been a determining force in the moulding of the character of the nation. And *bushido* is not dead, for the spirit of the Samurai still walks abroad among the people who are their descendants. *Rectitude, courage, benevolence, veracity, honour,* and *loyalty*, the principles of a moral code which formed the directing influence in the lives of the military caste for generations, still blossom with their old fragrance among the soldiers of the Mikado to-day. The *rectitude* of the Japanese soldier of to-day is still "the power of deciding upon a certain course of conduct in accordance with reason, without wavering—to die when it is right to die, to strike when to strike is right;"[1] the duty of loyalty is still a virtue in comparison with which no life is

[1] Bushido. Inazo Nitobé.

too dear to sacrifice, and what further proof can be required than the heroic storming of Kin Chau, to take but a single instance, that whenever a cause presents itself which is considered dearer than life, now as in the past, "with utmost serenity and celerity life will be laid down." An intense patriotism permeates the whole people. To the Japanese their country is "more than land and soil from which to mine gold or to reap grain—it is the sacred abode of the gods, the spirits of their forefathers;"[1] to them the Emperor is "the bodily representative of Heaven on earth, blending in his person its power and its mercy,"[2] sentiments which are inculcated by their national religion.

It is this national feeling, the evolution of generations, which has become a part of the national existence of Japan, that must be reckoned with as an intangible power, fighting in the midst of and inspiring her armies. "What won the battles on the Yalu, in Korea, and Manchuria," writes the Japanese author already quoted,[3] "was the ghosts of our fathers, guiding our hands and beating in our hearts. To those who have eyes to see they are clearly visible. Scratch a Japanese of the most advanced ideas, and he will show a Samurai." Lastly, honour — the treasured honour of the ancient Samurai, beneath whose dazzling ray life itself appeared of small account —has been sorely slighted, so that the whole population, from highest to lowest, smarts keenly under the humiliation of 1895, and is prepared to wreak vengeance upon its authors;—national feeling, that is, is deeply and universally stirred against Russia.

In light of such considerations the success which has

[1] Bushido. Inazo Nitobé. [2] Ibid.
[3] Inazo Nitobé.

so far attended the Japanese arms becomes perfectly intelligible, and further victories are indeed to be anticipated. Local conquest may well prove to be the reward that awaits the Japanese; but whether such success is destined to be productive of lasting material result depends neither upon the generals of Japan nor upon the Russian armies in the Far East, but upon the internal condition of the Russian empire. "Russia," say her supporters, "will never give in; she will carry on the war for years if need be, and, by sheer brute force and stamina, wear out her antagonists." That may be, though it rests neither with the admirer nor with the critic to decide. How long the heart of the Russian people, stirred to action by repeated reverses in a war in which they have no interest and which they do not understand, will bear with a governmental system beneath whose iron heel they have long been crushed, is not for the boldest vaticinator to foretell. Be it remembered only that it is in the heart and fibre of the people in the last resort that the fate of nations is fast held.

CHAPTER XXX.

LAST WORDS.

The object of British policy—General Chapman quoted—Present conditions cannot be permanent—Professor Vambery quoted—India the fulcrum of British rule in Asia—Lord Curzon on the internal condition of India.

In the concluding section of the present volume I have endeavoured to draw attention to the general situation in the East, as it affects this country at the present time. I am bold enough to hope that in the earlier chapters something may have been found in the description of Eastern life and Eastern countries that may have proved of interest to those who, while unable to visit such countries for themselves, have nevertheless a fancy for casting an Asian horoscope.

The present object of British policy has, I hope, been made clear—namely, to so guard and strengthen those oriental kingdoms which constitute the dividing neutral zone between the spheres of influence and interest of this country and Russia as to preserve from dangerous contact the ambitions of the two great Powers from the West to whom has fallen the golden heritage of the East. "By the extension of our Indian railway system," writes General Chapman, "to adjoining states and the development of commerce, we may oppose a Russian advance by means other than those of war,

and ensure a recognition of our Asiatic Empire as aiming at the wellbeing and civilisation of all the countries coming under its influence,"[1] and there can be few who will deny that in the gradual extension of railways and the fostering of commercial intercourse, together with the assumption of a firm attitude at Constantinople, Teherân, and Peking, are to be found the means at our disposal by which we may seek to obtain our end.

But while pursuing a policy which is directed towards such a goal, it would be folly to postulate for it any probability of finality. The life of the monarchies of the ancient world may under skilful treatment be considerably prolonged, but sooner or later collapse must supervene. For "the kingdoms of Islam are crumbling," and there is more than one Eastern ruler who may well cry with the Amir of Kabul,

> "Around me a voice ever rings,
> Of death, and the doom of my country;
> Shall I be the last of its kings?"[2]

To those who have eyes to see the fatal handwriting is traced clearly upon the wall. The old order passeth away, the kingdoms of Asia are being weighed in the balance and found wanting, and the days that remain to them are numbered. "The endeavour of the Great Powers," writes Professor Vambery, "to secure the independence and integrity of Persia has only an abstract value, for maladministration, anarchy, and Asiatic corruption have brought that country to the verge of ruin. Its neighbours must needs reckon with its forthcoming decay, and England has time enough to make good the blunders committed and to protect

[1] "Our Commercial Policy in the East." A paper read before the Central Asian Society by General E. F. Chapman, C.B.

[2] Verses written in India. Sir A. Lyall.

her economic and political interests by an energetic policy."[1]

Let us not be blind, then, to the fact that the day must come, be it far off or near at hand, when all that is left of old-world despotism shall have been ground to chaff between the inexorable millstones of Western progress, and that the Power that has toiled and wrought with the clearest foresight and the greatest amount of determination to secure its position in the present, will speak with commanding voice when the day of disruption is at hand. An energetic and consistent policy may retain under the peaceful ægis of Great Britain the southern provinces of Persia; a vacillating and half-hearted procedure can only result in eventually forcing upon her the unenviable task of creating another Gibraltar upon the frowning heights of Oman, even should no worse thing befall her.

All those, then, who have given passing thought to the great problems of empire in the East must welcome with gratitude the straightforward statements of a no half-hearted determination to protect our interests there, which have more than once been made in recent years by responsible statesmen, and must view with satisfaction such signs as are visible of a recrudescence of British power.

And as it is in India that is to be found the fulcrum of British rule throughout the East, so it is with pardonable pride and satisfaction that we look back upon the years of strenuous endeavour which a succession of devoted Englishmen have bestowed upon her. No more welcome sound could fall upon the ears of the people to whose keeping has been confided the sacred trust of an Eastern empire than the words uttered by Lord Curzon at the conclusion of a comprehensive

[1] Pester Lloyd, June 1903.

review of the position of India, when he modestly expressed the hope that from a period of stress and labour had perhaps emerged an India "better equipped to face the many problems which confront her, stronger and better guarded on her frontiers, with her agriculture, her industries, her commerce, her education, her irrigation, her railways, her army, and her police brought up to a higher state of efficiency—with every section of her administrative machinery in better repair, with her credit re-established, her currency restored, the material prosperity of her people enhanced, and their loyalty strengthened."[1]

With courageous and far-seeing statesmen at the helm, backed by the heart and feeling of the British people, inspired by a true appreciation of the responsibilities of a world-wide Empire, the ship of State, whose ensign flies as the emblem of civilisation, peace, and justice on every sea, may be trusted to steer safely through the storm-tossed waters of the Eastern hemisphere.

[1] Speech on the Indian Budget, March 1904.

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MAP SHOWING THE AUTHOR'S ROUTE & the proposed *trace* of the BAGHDAD RAILWAY

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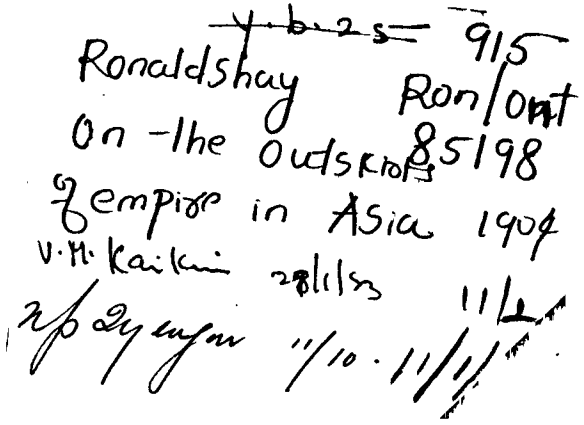

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